

THE SUNDAY TIMES



Unlucky in love, some single women go overseas to have babies
A2

HIV DATA LEAK

Feels like there's a sword over my head

Singaporeans on leaked HIV list tell The Sunday Times that the last week has been hell



'I'm not dirty though I have HIV'

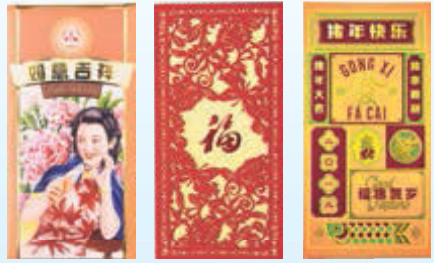
Adrian Tyler, a 27-year-old with HIV, opens up on the stigma he faces

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Life goes the whole hog

Hongbao quiz



Yusheng ala pork

Famous people born in the Year of the Pig
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CHUA MUI HOONG

Missing ingredient in hawker debate is hawkers B10

Merdeka package to include some who missed Pioneer benefits

Those born in 1949 or earlier, and got citizenship by 1996, eligible for scheme that covers healthcare subsidies



Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong with Madam Hajjah Hasnah Masnod and her husband, Mr Haji Mawi Ismail, and Health Minister Gan Kim Yong (at right) prior to a tribute event to the Merdeka Generation at Gardens by the Bay yesterday.
ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

Tiffany Fumiko Tay

The beneficiaries of the Merdeka Generation Package will extend beyond the 500,000 Singaporeans born in the 1950s, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday.

Besides these men and women whose resourcefulness, determination and sense of duty played a key role in shaping Singapore, some of those who did not qualify for the Pioneer Generation Package will also receive help for their healthcare needs, he said.

The Pioneer Generation Package, given out in 2014, was for Singaporeans born in 1949 or earlier and received their citizenship by 1986.

The latest move extends benefits to those who obtained citizenship up to a decade later. There are no available figures for how large this group is. They will join the Merdeka Generation – Singaporeans aged between 60 and 69 this year – who are eligible for the latest multibillion-dollar scheme.

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat and Health Minister Gan Kim Yong will announce details of the Merdeka Generation Package in Parliament later this month, PM Lee said at a tribute event for about 200 members of the Merdeka Generation at Gardens by the Bay's Flower Field Hall.

The package was first announced during PM Lee's National Day Rally speech last year, where he coined the term "Merdeka Generation" to refer to about 500,000 Singaporeans born in the 1950s.

The generation "lived through the battles and upheavals of the Merdeka struggle", accepting hardships and making sacrifices to help shape post-independence Singapore, he said then.

The men of the Merdeka generation were among the earliest batches to do national service, while many women had to cut short their education to support their families and siblings in the early years of independence.

Like the \$8 billion Pioneer Generation Package, the Merdeka Generation Package will cover subsidies for outpatient care, Medisave top-ups, MediShield Life premium subsidies and payouts for long-term care, but the benefits will be less.

This is because the later generation had more advantages in life in terms of education, lifetime earnings and Central Provident Fund savings, PM Lee had said last year.

He said yesterday, however, that the latest package would still be "substantial". Thanking them for their contributions, he said: "Our grandchildren enjoy educational opportunities beyond anything that our generation imagined."

"Our economy is more vibrant, our companies more prosperous, our jobs more fulfilling and rewarding, our social fabric is stronger... the Merdeka Generation played a big part in making all this happen."

He said members of the Merdeka Generation are now passing on the baton as Singapore faces new challenges, including keeping the economy competitive, preparing for an ageing population and maintaining social mobility.

More challenges will come, and Singaporeans cannot afford to take them lightly as success is never certain, warned PM Lee, who turns 67 on Feb 10 and is himself part of the Merdeka Generation.

"But neither have we any cause to be daunted, for as the Merdeka Generation has shown time and again, Singapore can and will come through, provided we pull together and tackle the challenges as one."

Passing down their life experience and survival values to future generations will do another great service to Singapore, he said.

"If future generations share your resourcefulness, determination and sense of duty – the Merdeka spirit – Singapore will continue to do well."

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SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A4

Plans for random alcohol tests for pilots departing Singapore

Karamjit Kaur
Senior Aviation Correspondent

Singapore is getting tough on pilots who drink and fly, with plans for random alcohol testing from next month. The Sunday Times understands this will affect all departing pilots, including those from foreign airlines.

Those caught exceeding the alcohol limit stipulated by the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS), even if they are first-time offenders, could be fined and jailed.

The plans for stiffer rules come after Singapore Airlines (SIA) fired a pilot who failed an alcohol test in Australia, before he was to operate

a flight. The September incident in Melbourne forced the airline to cancel a flight.

As is the practice in countries such as Australia and Britain, where random alcohol testing is already being done, foreign pilots caught here can either be dealt with by the Singapore authorities or returned to their own regulators.

CAAS has also asked local carriers – the SIA group and Jetstar Asia – to submit plans to manage alcohol abuse. These should include a system that encourages pilots to report their peers suspected of drinking – without any fear or risk of their careers being affected – and those with a drinking problem to come forward.

Airlines should also have an effective rehabilitation programme for those who need help, with the aim of getting pilots back in the cockpit.

CAAS is working with Changi General Hospital to set up an Aeromedical Specialist Centre, which will include treatment for alcohol addiction. Details such as where the centre will be located and who it will cater for are not yet known.

Sharing its plans at a briefing on Friday for airlines and other stakeholders, CAAS said its aim is to develop a strong deterrent and effective rehabilitation programme, those who attended the session told The Sunday Times.

Alcohol testing is needed so that aviation safety is never compromised and alcohol management is key, attendees were told.

Under the current Air Navigation Order, it is an offence for pilots who fly out of Singapore's airports and those flying anywhere for a Singapore-registered aircraft to be under the influence of alcohol.

The maximum penalty is a \$100,000 fine and five years' jail.

Asked about last Friday's session, CAAS director (flight standards) Alan Foo said CAAS is engaging the industry on enhancements to the regulatory framework on alcohol testing and management for pilots and details will be shared later.

At the briefing, CAAS stressed that even as it pushes for stricter regulations, random alcohol testing

for pilots will be done discreetly and away from the public eye.

Pilots reporting for flights will first undergo a breathalyser test about an hour before the scheduled take-off. The plan is for the test to be done at the aerobridge before the crew enter the aircraft and before passengers board.

If alcohol is detected, they will be sent for further checks to determine the actual level.

Pilots and airlines The Sunday Times spoke to support the plans for tougher laws.

Said a senior Singapore captain who declined to be named: "The success of the programme will depend on the effectiveness of the peer and self reporting, as well as

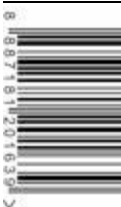
the overall support network."

Foreign carriers said they will comply with the law wherever they fly to.

An AirAsia spokesman said: "We already comply with similar testing regimes where our airlines are based, such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Japan."

"As part of our commitment to safety, AirAsia also has a very strict drug and alcohol policy, including for pilots who produce a blood alcohol reading of any level."

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Yuen Sin

Thirty-five-year-old Isabelle, who runs a dance enrichment school, has always longed to have a child of her own.

But though she had been in a six-year relationship, things did not work out. With marriage looking unlikely in the near future as she edged closer to her mid-30s, she began looking into ways of getting pregnant on her own two years ago.

She decided on artificial insemination via donor sperm.

But as such assisted reproduction treatments – which also include in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) – here are available only to married couples, Isabelle boarded a flight to Sydney in November 2017. There, a doctor inserted into her body sperm from an anonymous Asian donor.

“I will not hide the fact that the child doesn’t have a father. If the child is brought up knowing the truth, the child will live with it and grow up knowing that he or she was created with love, and created by choice,” Isabelle, who declined to give her real name, told The Sunday Times.

While most unwed mothers here fall into the situation by accident, Isabelle is part of a small but growing group that set out to become unwed mothers by choice – and taking a plane to clinics overseas to make it happen.

A check found that they are venturing to countries such as Britain, Spain and Canada.

Last year, the London Women’s Clinic in Britain received about 100 inquiries from single Singaporean women about its assisted reproduction procedures, double that in 2017. Of these, 10 eventually went through with the treatment.

Fertility clinic IVI-RMA, headquartered in Spain, has also seen the number of single Singaporean women going for fertility treatments at its Spanish clinics triple from 2014 to 2018.

In total, 13 women in their late 30s to early 40s have gone through artificial insemination and IVF since 2014, said an IVI-RMA spokesman. Two or three also headed to the Olive Fertility Clinic, headquartered in Vancouver over the past decade.

Fees for artificial insemination range from \$1,000 to about \$2,000, while those for IVF range from \$7,000 to about \$17,000.

The clinics do not have data on how many of them successfully became pregnant.

More Singaporean women across all age groups are staying single compared with the figures in 2007, with the biggest proportion of women remaining unmarried in the prime childbearing years of 25 to 29, according to the annual Population in Brief report, released last year.

This also coincided with Singapore’s total fertility rate plunging to

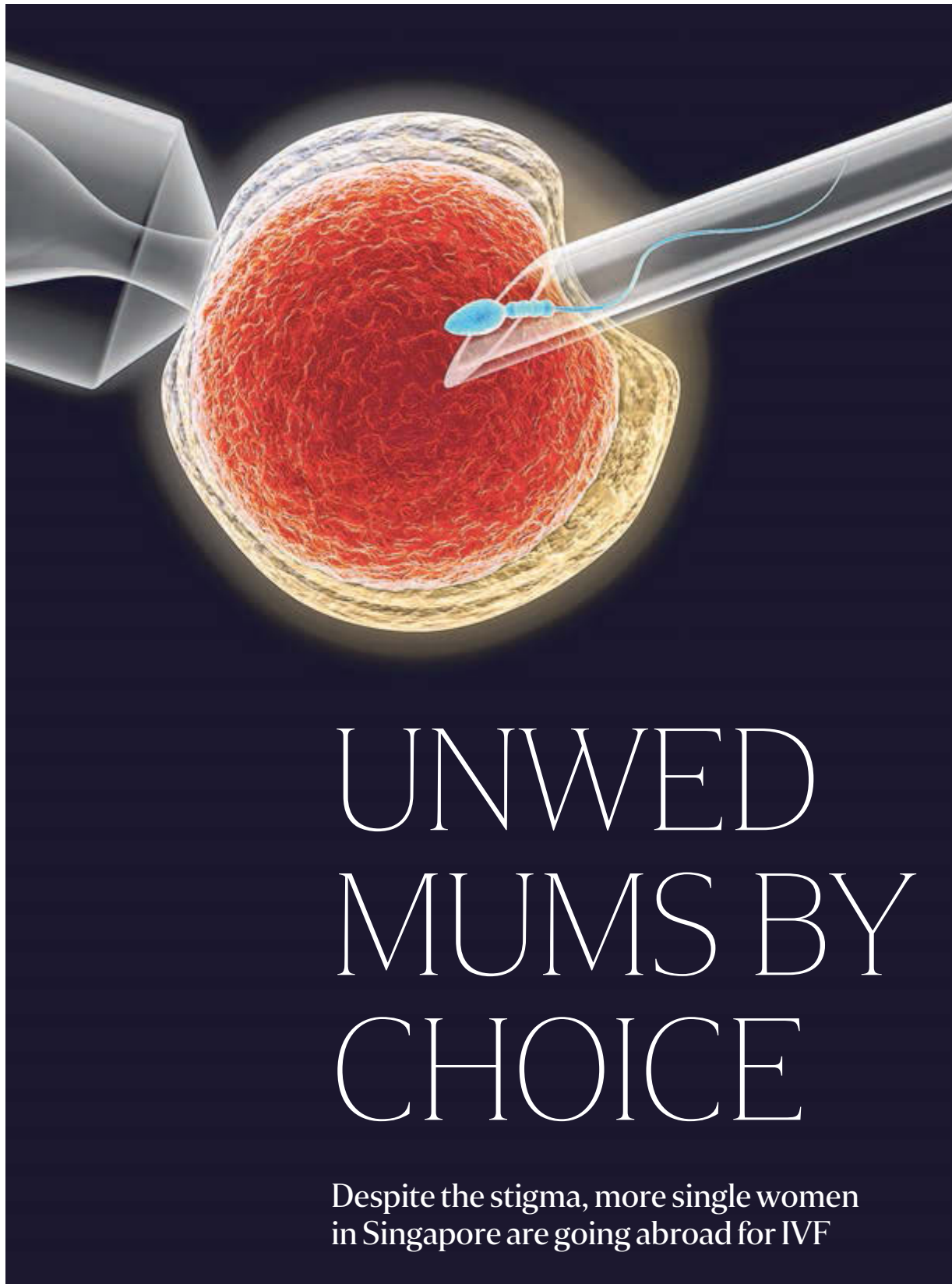


PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

a seven-year low of 1.16 in 2017.

Singapore Management University sociology professor Paulin Straughan said that such a trend of single women becoming mothers by choice will not ebb.

It is already widespread in the United States, which has 30,000 people in a support group for such mothers. In Denmark, one in 10 babies conceived with donor sperm is born to a woman without a partner, The Guardian reported in 2015.

Said Prof Straughan: “Women now have greater expectations of what constitutes a good life partner, compared with a few decades ago. With their biological clocks ticking away, those who have the

means and who cannot wait any longer (for a partner to live and grow a family with) may decide to find alternative options.”

However, it is not likely to become a norm here, as Singapore is still relatively conservative, added Prof Straughan. In 2017, 836 babies were born to unwed mothers here, according to a response to a parliamentary question last year – a drop from the 1,218 in 2007.

Policies here are also geared towards the traditional family unit. Unmarried mothers will not get the Baby Bonus cash gift and parent-hood tax rebates that other singles, such as widows and divorcees, receive. They also have to wait until

they turn 35 to buy a Housing Board flat under the singles scheme.

However, whether they are born in Singapore or overseas, their children can be granted Singapore citizenship status either by birth or descent. The Status of Children (Assisted Reproduction Technology) Act also regards an unwed mother who gave birth to a child through assisted reproduction as the child’s legal parent, said family lawyer Sim Bock Eng.

Nee Soon GRC MP Louis Ng said that this group is unlikely to require additional financial support, as they tend to be older and usually earn higher incomes.

STRONG SENSE OF PURPOSE

I am not worried about any social stigma... I have a strong (sense of) purpose in making this decision and hence I will be very proud of it.



ISABELLE, who underwent screening tests for IVF treatment in Malaysia recently.

CHILD’S WELFARE IS TOP PRIORITY

The welfare of the child should continue to be prioritised, and we should ensure that the child does not feel discriminated against.



NEE SOON GRC MP LOUIS NG, on children born to unmarried mothers through IVF.

The average monthly income of those above 35 was \$5,700 in 2017, compared with \$1,800 for those below 35, according to figures from the Ministry of Social and Family Development in response to a parliamentary question from Mr Ng last year. “The welfare of the child should continue to be prioritised, and we should ensure that the child does not feel discriminated against,” he said.

After her procedure in Australia, Isabelle got a positive pregnancy result but found out two weeks later that she had suffered a chemical pregnancy – a term referring to a very early miscarriage.

Her heart is still set on becoming a mother, and she has recently gone through screening tests for IVF treatment in Malaysia. She has ruled out adoption, which she felt was a longer and more complex process that required the approval of the authorities.

Though Isabelle’s mother was initially hesitant about her decision, she later decided to give her blessing. Her friends are also supportive and are eager to become god-parents to her child, if the IVF treatment is successful.

“I am not worried about any social stigma,” said Isabelle. “I have a strong (sense of) purpose in making this decision and hence I will be very proud of it. When the society is closed, we educate it.”

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S. Korean drama casts spotlight on highly-paid personal coaches

Chang May Choon
South Korea Correspondent
In Seoul

The success of South Korea’s fictional education-themed drama Sky Castle has highlighted the country’s stressful paper chase and piqued curiosity about the elusive coordinator hired by rich mums in the series to coach their children to get a coveted spot at top universities.

Aired on cable channel JTBC and Netflix, the 20-part series chronicles the lives of four elite families living in a luxurious residential estate called Sky Castle.

Experts attribute its success to its gripping portrayal of South Korea’s fiercely competitive education system and dramatic plot twists which drive home the sobering fact that a competitive school system and social pressure can cause a parent’s best intentions to go awry.

Ratings soared from 1.7 per cent for episode one to a high of 23.7 per cent for last Friday’s finale.

Some subplots are based on real stories, like the 2015 case of a Korean girl faking admission into both Harvard University and Stanford University, and last year’s case of a teacher at Sookmyung Girl’s High School leaking examination papers to his twins who were pupils there.

In a country where college enrolment rate is 70 per cent, many parents yearn to get their children into one of the top three universities, dubbed SKY – Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University.

In the drama, the secret is to hire a “codi” (short for coordinator in Korean) – a personal coach who commands hundreds of millions of won, enough to buy a house – for planning a student’s study schedule, providing counselling and getting the

student into the college of choice.

In one scene, a mother is seen trying to bribe the codi by giving her gold bars hidden in a lunch box.

Experts said the codi does exist, but he or she will likely work confidentially as it is illegal to charge such high fees.

What is more common, however, are university admissions consultants hired by private education firms who advise parents on how to boost their children’s chances of getting into a top university.

They can be former teachers or university admissions office staff, but are bound by Education Ministry rules to charge a maximum of 300,000 won (\$360) an hour. Private coaching at home is not allowed.

However some consultants can privately – and illegally – charge up to 10 times more, according to Mr Lee Man-gi of university admissions consulting firm Uway.

He told JoongAng Ilbo newspaper that it costs about 3 million won for a consultant to write a cover letter to support a university application, and 10 million to follow a student’s progress over three years of high school. Observers believe Sky Castle could drive more parents to look for codis.

Dr Emanuel Pastreich, president of The Asia Institute think-tank and a former history and culture professor at Kyung Hee University, said the show “reflects a society which is aware that there is something profoundly wrong in the concentration of wealth and the use of education as a means of achieving power, rather than knowledge and wisdom, but at the same time is not ready to make a more profound critique of the nature of the problem”.

“After watching I felt a certain drive to succeed wash over me, not repentance for misplaced priorities,” he told The Sunday Times.



In the drama, the secret is to hire a “codi” (short for coordinator in Korean) – a personal coach who commands hundreds of millions of won, enough to buy a house – for planning a student’s study schedule, providing counselling and getting the student into the college of choice.



Two consulting firms said they have seen inquiries increase since the show began last November. “Some parents want us to do everything like in the drama, but it’s not possible,” said a representative from MiraeBijeon (Korean for Future Vision), adding that it does not make house visits or chauffeur students around. “What we do is to help set a direction and schedule for university admission. We also provide counselling if the student’s goal or purpose is not clear, which can affect his studies.”

Some parents feel the cut-throat

competition is worse in real life.

High school teacher Kwon Ki-ha said most of the education problems tackled in the drama are not new. But he also pointed out that the issues apply mainly to “Gangnam mums” who vie to send their children to the best schools in the posh Seoul district.

Finance executive Hannah Choi, 47, who has an 11-year-old daughter, said she was once introduced to a codi who charged 4 million won for recommending good *hagwon* – private tuition centres.

She decided not to take up the of-

fer, but does not rule out doing so in the future.

“Working mums don’t have as much time and information compared with stay-home mums, so we would outsource it to a codi,” she said. “If a codi has a proven track record to send a child to a top school, her value will become higher. That’s why the Sky Castle codi can charge so much – she has a 100 per cent success rate.”

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• Additional reporting by Dami Shin

Fictional education-themed drama Sky Castle has piqued curiosity about the “codi” hired by rich mums in the series to coach their children. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Photos circulating online show Richard Muljadi getting married to former model and actress Shalynne Chang at a church, with comments from netizens ranging from praise to expressions of shock as to how he could have been allowed out of detention. PHOTOS: TWITTER, AIDATANIHAHA/TWITTER

Questions raised after detained Indonesian heir holds wedding

Photos of Richard Muljadi getting married have gone viral, as he was meant to be detained in hospital for drug abusers

Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

The grandson of one of Indonesia's richest women was meant to be detained in a hospital for drug abusers, awaiting trial after police allegedly caught him sniffing cocaine in a shopping mall toilet.

So when photos went viral of

31-year-old Richard Muljadi getting married to a former model and actress at a church, it raised questions as to why he was allowed out.

Muljadi is the grandson of Ms Kartini Muljadi, 88, who owns companies that make medicine and consumer goods such as drinks and soap.

He is standing trial after police arrested him at a Jakarta mall last August, confiscating a mobile phone,

an Australian five-dollar bill and a remnant of white powder that later proved to be cocaine.

In one of several photos in circulation, he can be seen wearing a black suit next to 28-year-old Shalynne Chang, who is in a white gown and holding a bridal bouquet.

Mr Supardi, head of South Jakarta's state prosecutor office, told reporters on Friday that his office never issued a permit to Muljadi to leave detention to hold a wedding, adding that the inmate had never made a request to do so.

He told local media that Muljadi is currently detained under a

rehabilitation programme at a designated hospital for drug abusers. He pledged his office would investigate and get hold of the relevant agencies responsible for the incident.

Comments on the circulating photos ranged from praise to expressions of shock as to how Muljadi could have been allowed out of detention.

Instagram celebrity account lambe_turah (a pseudonym), which has 6.1 million followers, said: "Happy wedding... You are handsome."

But another user, Ms Sri Siska Rahayu, questioned his freedom, ask-

ing: "How could he possibly be outside?"

Mr David Chen wrote "What a mess. How much was the bribe?" while Mr Joe Anto said "Money supersedes the law".

Lawyer-turned-entrepreneur Kartini Muljadi has repeatedly been one of the few women to have appeared in Forbes Indonesia's list of 50 richest individuals, with a net worth of around US\$600 million (S\$810 million). Her family controls listed pharmaceutical firm Tempo Scan Pacific.

Her grandson regularly showed his audience on his Instagram account how some of that money was spent before he made his account private.

In one picture, he is standing next to two red Ferraris while a short video highlights how he spent a day at home, showing him starting the engine of his red Porsche 911 Carrera, then his yellow Lamborghini, before cruising around his swimming pool in a Yamaha WaveRunner jet boat.

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Merdeka Generation grew up together with the nation: PM

Those born in the 1950s helped the country weather crisis after crisis



(From left) Local musicians Jacintha Abisheganaden, Mel Ferdinands, Rahimah Rahim and Dick Lee performing for their fellow Merdeka Generation members at a tribute event at Gardens by the Bay yesterday. ST PHOTOS: NG SOR LUAN

Tiffany Fumiko Tay

The Merdeka Generation's story is closely intertwined with the Singapore story, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday.

Those in his generation grew up when Singapore became independent and lived through tumultuous times, he said at an event that paid tribute to those who helped build the nation.

PM Lee is among about half a million Singaporeans born in the 1950s, termed the Merdeka Generation.

"We were barely in our teens, but we could sense that the times were different, and we were about to experience a major change," he said at Gardens by the Bay's Flower Field Hall.

During those critical years, the People's Action Party won the General Election in 1959 and formed the Government for the first time.

EXCITEMENT AND SCEPTICISM

When Singapore declared its independence, while some were so excited that they set off firecrackers to mark the occasion, there were others who were sceptical if this tiny country could survive.

”

PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG

Then in 1963 came the merger with Malaysia, followed by separation and "unexpected independence", said PM Lee, who spoke in Mandarin, Malay and English.

"We witnessed the violence on the streets during the communal riots, and were afraid for our lives and also of one another," he added.

"When Singapore declared its independence, while some were so excited that they set off firecrackers to mark the occasion, there were others who were sceptical if this tiny country could survive."

That experience shaped their generation's outlook and propelled them to make sacrifices for the country.

They have since built good careers, provided for their families and lived full lives, and can look back with some satisfaction on what they have achieved together, said PM Lee.

Singapore has transformed over the years, with the Marina Bay sit-

ting on reclaimed land that was once the open sea.

Modern Housing Board flats are a far cry from the "chap lau chu" (10-storey) flats in the first housing estates and kampung houses without running water, he noted.

In retrospect, success in overcoming crises and problems may have seemed foreordained, but "in reality, this was not a superhero movie", PM Lee added.

With each crisis, the Merdeka Generation had to prove that it had the tenacity and unity to pull together and rise to the challenge.

Its members faced vulnerable moments, from the early years of independence, when Malay Singaporeans became a minority overnight and relatives found themselves divided by a political border, to the shock withdrawal of British troops barely two years later.

"We risked being left exposed and vulnerable in a volatile and unstable region, but we gritted our teeth and served national service, built up the SAF (Singapore Armed Forces) quickly and kept Singapore safe," PM Lee said.

Other storms that were weathered included the discovery of the Jemaah Islamiah terrorist group's plans for suicide attacks in Singapore, which threatened security and racial harmony, and the severe acute respiratory syndrome outbreak, when fear and anxiety gripped the nation.

There were also major economic challenges, from the 1973 oil crisis to Singapore's first major recession in 1985, which led to deep and painful cuts in employer Central Provident Fund (CPF) contributions. A decade later came the Asian financial crisis, when neighbouring economies began to topple and more CPF cuts were needed, followed by the 2008 global financial crisis.

These were defining moments for the Merdeka Generation, which faced the problems resolutely, worked with the Government and, when necessary, "accepted the bitter medicine that made us strong again", said PM Lee.

The event yesterday featured performances by local musicians and fellow Merdeka Generation members Dick Lee, Jacintha Abisheganaden, Mel Ferdinands and Rahimah Rahim.

They sang for the first time the Merdeka Sayang song, a riff on Dick Lee's 1989 remix of the Malay folk song Rasa Sayang.

The veteran singer-songwriter, who penned the lyrics, said that as a teenager, "the most frustrating thing for me was having a voice as a musician, wanting to be heard and understood, and trying to make Singapore music when the Singapore identity was not yet formed".

The song also emphasises that members of his generation are still active, with dreams to pursue, he added.

"We're getting tired of being regarded as oldies... we had energy then to build, and we have energy now to carry on."

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(From left) Mr Eric Wong, 63, Mr Mohamed Salleh Ali, 61, and Mr Nijinder Sharma, 68, were among some 200 members of the Merdeka Generation who were honoured for their contributions yesterday.

Honoured for 'can-do' spirit that helped in nation building

After completing secondary school and receiving his O-level certificate, Mr Mohamed Salleh Ali did not seek higher education.

Instead, he took on a job at the fire brigade at the age of 17 to help support his parents and five siblings, who lived in a kampung in Radin Mas.

His mother, a housewife who did some needlework to supplement the family income, did not initially approve of such a risky line of work.

"When I got the first pay packet, I gave it to her," Mr Salleh, 61, told The Sunday Times.

The \$239 was "something I earned for my family," he added.

In his 44 years with what is now known as the Singapore Civil Defence Force, he has served as a first responder during the construction of the first MRT train tunnels and rescued survivors of the 1986 Hotel New World collapse by digging with his bare hands.

The Regimental Sergeant Major at the Civil Defence Academy was among 200 members of the Merdeka Generation – Singaporeans born in the 1950s – who were honoured for their contributions to nation building yesterday.

The racial riots that erupted around the time of Singapore's independence in the 1960s were an "eye opener", said Mr Salleh.

Speaking about founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, he began to tear.

"I salute him... even though I'm Malay and he's Chinese, he came to the consensus that we are Singaporeans. That's why we have one united Singapore."

Mr Nijinder Sharma, who was among the earliest fighter pilots in the Singapore Air Defence

Command when he joined in 1969, said there was an urgent need at the time to put together a strong defence force for the new nation.

"There was no one to hold our hands – we had to develop our own procedures, learn from our own mistakes, and even draft our own doctrines," said Mr Sharma, 68, who now runs a firm that provides support services for private flights.

"When we started it was a very different era... I'm very proud to say that the generation at that time had a 'can-do' attitude," he added.

Housewife Goh Fang Lui, 64, recalled that her primary school was a basic attic house in a kampung with few amenities.

In contrast, students nowadays study in schools that are very well equipped, she noted.

"So for future generations, I hope we can encourage them to have the spirit of being able to overcome difficulties and withstand hardship," she said.

Mr Eric Wong, 63, said life in the early days was "very basic – we would think only about what we needed on a day-to-day basis."

But he fared better than the generation before him due to its sacrifices, "and my children better than me".

"Hopefully this goes on and Singapore becomes more successful in future," said Mr Wong, a mediator.

The biggest lesson he hopes to pass on to the next generation?

"The most important thing is to be resilient, no matter what happens – have a positive outlook for the future."

Tiffany Fumiko Tay

Celebrating Chinese New Year – in a Hindu temple



Chinese New Year took on a multicultural flavour yesterday when Singapore's oldest Hindu temple opened its doors for its annual celebration, complete with a lion dance and hongbao distributions.

Temple volunteer Ayyavoo Sulochana (in red sari), 76, added to the good cheer by serving food to seniors from welfare homes.

Residents from Chinatown, where the temple is located, and senior citizens from welfare homes as well as representatives from grassroots and community organisations were invited to join in the festivities.

This is the 16th year that Sri Mariamman Temple, managed by the Hindu Endowments Board, has hosted Chinese New Year celebrations.

Guests were served Chinese vegetarian dishes prepared by temple volunteers and tossed lo hei, in keeping with Chinese New Year tradition. They were also treated to multicultural performances such as the Indian Bharatanatyam dance, lion dance and Malay dance with Indian and Chinese music.

Senior citizens and welfare home residents also received goodie bags and hongbao.

Mr Baey Yam Keng, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Culture, Community and Youth, and Transport, chipped in to help distribute the hongbao.

ST PHOTO: SAHIBA CHAUDHARY

Eating less white rice may not cut diabetes risk, studies show

Substitute foods, if not chosen correctly, could turn out to be healthier choices instead

Rei Kurohi

Cutting down on white rice to lower your risk of diabetes? It may be more important to pay attention to what you are eating in place of it.

Two new studies by researchers from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Duke-NUS Medical School have shown that those who ate less rice also ate more of everything else to maintain the same calorie intake.

Some ate more red meat and poultry to feel full, but such a diet has a higher risk of diabetes, said Professor Rob Martinus van Dam, domain leader of epidemiology at the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health in NUS, one of the co-authors.

Others ate more noodle dishes, which are often cooked in sauces that are high in sugar, salt and oil.

Despite a lower rice intake, these substitutes could increase their risk of diabetes, said Prof van Dam.

On the other hand, those who ate

more whole grains and vegetables in place of rice had a decreased risk.

Professor Koh Woon Puay, director of the Centre for Clinician-Scientist Development at Duke-NUS Medical School and a co-author of the studies, said: "The risk depends more on the overall quality of a person's diet. Recommendations to reduce white rice consumption may be effective only if the substitute foods are considered carefully."

Dr Annie Ling, group director of policy, research and surveillance at the Health Promotion Board (HPB), said the findings lined up with the HPB's recommendation to eat more brown rice.

"It is important to look at diet in totality, and not overly focus on any individual component," said Dr Ling. "Some tend to make up for eating less rice by eating more unhealthy food. We must be mindful of how the deficit is made up."

The studies follow a series of research linking white rice intake to diabetes.



One of the new studies found no link between total white rice intake and the risk of Type 2 diabetes when controlled for variables like age, gender, Body Mass Index and other food intakes.
ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

Data for the new studies came from the ongoing Singapore Chinese Health Study started in 1993 by NUS. It involved about 45,400 Chinese Singaporeans who did not have diabetes, cancer or cardiovascular diseases when they were recruited between 1993 and 1998. Over an average of 11 years, more than 5,200 developed diabetes.

rice may thus be attributable to what is eaten with the rice. Over 90 per cent of diabetics have Type 2 diabetes, the result of blocked or reduced insulin receptors.

The second study, also involving Prof van Dam and Prof Koh, used established diet quality indices to determine the quality of a person's dietary pattern. They then measured the link between diet quality and diabetes risk.

A list of 165 food items and beverages were identified, covering about 90 per cent of what is commonly eaten in Singapore. They were scored according to the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (Dash) diet index.

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than 5,200 developed diabetes.

The participants' diets were ranked according to how often and how much of a given food they ate on average. Those who ate more whole grains, low-fat dairy, nuts, seeds, legumes, fruits and vegetables scored higher. Those who had more processed and red meats, sugary drinks and sodium scored lower.

The top 20 per cent, who had relatively "higher quality" diets, were nearly 30 per cent less likely to develop diabetes compared with the bottom 20 per cent.

The proportion of each item as a part of a consistent dietary pattern was found to be more important than the absolute intake, said Prof Koh, who is also the principal investigator in the Singapore Chinese Health Study.

This means one does not have to cut out unhealthy foods entirely, as long as they are eaten in moderation, she added.

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Usher in the Lunar New Year with Standard Chartered Credit Cards.

Disney Gift 2019 Promotion¹

From 28 January to 28 February 2019, spend a minimum of S\$188 on eligible same-day retail transaction(s) to redeem a limited edition SC-Disney Stainless Steel Bottle.

28 January – 13 February 2019	14 February – 28 February 2019
 SC-Disney Stainless Steel Bottle (Grey)	 SC-Disney Stainless Steel Bottle (White)
Limited to the 1 st 1,500 redemptions.	Limited to the 1 st 1,500 redemptions.

Redemption of gift must be made on the same day as the eligible same-day retail transaction(s). Each eligible cardholder is limited to one gift per day. For redemption details, visit sc.com/sg/cny. Images of the gift(s) are for illustrative purposes only.

Spin to Prosperity 2019 Promotion²

From 22 January to 28 February 2019, stand to win cashback of up to S\$68 or a 3D2N Hong Kong Disneyland package for 2 when you spend a minimum of S\$188 in a single eligible retail transaction on your registered credit card. Limited to the first 100,000 qualifying transactions. Each eligible cardholder is limited to 5 winning transactions a day.

To register for the Spin to Prosperity promotion, SMS CNY19 to 77222 or +65 8318 4584 (if overseas) from your registered mobile number with the bank. Visit sc.com/sg/cny to find out more.

Don't have our card? Apply online today at sc.com/sg/cards



sc.com/sg

Here for good

1 The Disney Gift 2019 Promotion ("Promotion") is available from 28 January to 28 February 2019 (both dates inclusive) (the "Promotion Period"). The Promotion is open to all eligible principal cardholders of Standard Chartered Credit Cards ("Cards") issued by Standard Chartered Bank (Singapore) Limited ("Bank") (collectively, "Eligible Cardholders"). To qualify for the Promotion, Eligible Cardholders must, during the Promotion Period, charge in Singapore dollars, a minimum total of S\$188 of same-day retail transaction(s) (each an "Eligible Transaction" and collectively "Eligible Transactions") to their Cards. If the Eligible Cardholder satisfies the conditions above, he/she will be eligible to redeem one Standard Chartered ("SC")-Disney Stainless Steel Bottle ("Gift"). Redemption of the Gifts must be made on the same day of purchase and is available on a first come, first served basis, while stocks last. An Eligible Cardholder is limited to one (1) gift per day; limited to the first 3,000 redemptions during the Promotion Period. Original hardcopy charge slips presented for redemption of the Gifts must be on Eligible Transactions made and dated on the same day. Any number of original hardcopy charge slips can be combined to make the redemption. Eligible Cardholders are required to present their Credit Card(s) used for satisfying the Eligible Transactions as set out above and original hardcopy charge slips at: TANGS at Tang Plaza, Customer Service Counter, Level 4, 310 Orchard Road, Singapore 238864, 11:00am to 8:30pm (Monday – Sunday, excluding Public Holidays) to redeem the Gifts. **2** The Spin to Prosperity 2019 Promotion ("Promotion") is available from 22 January to 28 February 2019 (both dates inclusive) (the "Promotion Period"). The Promotion is open to all eligible principal cardholders of Standard Chartered Credit Cards ("Cards") issued by Standard Chartered Bank (Singapore) Limited ("Bank") (collectively, "Eligible Cardholders"). To participate in the Promotion, Eligible Cardholders must successfully register during the Registration Period, from 19 January to 26 February 2019 (both dates inclusive) ("Registration Period"). 2 calendar days from the time of registration is required for successful registration for the Promotion. To register for the Promotion, Eligible Cardholders must send an SMS composed in the following format: "CNY19" (Example: CNY19) to 77222 or +65 8318 4584 (if the Eligible Cardholder is sending the SMS when he/she is not in Singapore) from his/her mobile number that was registered with the Bank ("Bank Registered Mobile Number"). An acknowledgement of successful Registration will be sent to Cardholder's Bank Registered Mobile Number. Upon successful Registration, all of the Eligible Cardholder's validly existing Cards will be registered for the Promotion (such successfully registered card(s) referred to as a "Registered Card"), and the cardholder of such Registered Card, a "Registered Cardholder". All SMSes which are not in this prescribed format, sent to an incorrect number, or sent from a non-Bank Registered Mobile Number will not be accepted and will be considered by the Bank to be invalid and/or void, and the Bank's determination shall be final and conclusive. Eligible Cardholders need only register once to participate in the Promotion except that Registered Cardholders who have changed or updated their Bank Registered Mobile Number will have to re-register for the Promotion under the new number. Failure to re-register will mean that cardholder will not be eligible for the Promotion. To qualify, Eligible Cardholders must charge S\$188 or more on a single eligible transaction with a transaction date falling within the Promotion Period and successfully posted to the Registered Card account during the Promotion Period ("Spin to Prosperity Qualifying Transaction"). The first 100,000 Spin to Prosperity Qualifying Transactions (each a "Winning Transaction") will receive an SMS containing a unique URL ("Spin to Prosperity SMS"). Eligible Cardholders are eligible for one unique URL sent via one SMS with every Winning Transaction made, capped at a maximum of 5 Winning Transactions per day. Eligible Cardholders who have qualified to receive the Prizes will be notified either by mail or SMS by no later than 30 April 2019. All cashback Prizes will be credited to the relevant Winning Cardholders' Registered Card Account by 30 April 2019. SMSes will be sent to the relevant Winning Cardholder's Bank Registered Mobile Number to inform them that the cashback Prize amount has been credited to their Registered Card Account. Visit <https://www.sc.com/sg/cny> for full terms and conditions that apply.

HIV data leak

‘I had to go to work and face some pointed looks’

Fear, anger, helplessness among roller coaster of emotions for those affected by data breach

Cheryl Teh

One month ago, on Jan 5, Damien marked his 31st birthday. Two weeks later, he received a call: It was the Health Ministry ringing to say that details of his HIV status had been stolen.

The one secret that he had harboured deep inside him for the past eight years now threatens to spill out into the public sphere.

“Honestly, I never expected that one day I would feel as much anxiety as I did when I got my HIV diagnosis back in 2010,” says Damien, who declines to give his real name.

Last Monday’s announcement of the leak brought him back to that fateful day when he was told he had early-stage HIV, he tells The Sunday Times. He recalls bursting into tears and falling to his knees at the doctor’s office, during what he calls “the worst day of his life”.

Then, Damien had just returned

from a week-long trip in Japan. He felt like he was in the prime of life, and had lots of fun partying in Bangkok, Phuket and China.

But that all changed when his then girlfriend made him go for a HIV test. It came back positive, and she dumped him.

Damien then went on the long, and embarrassing route to retrace his steps, questioning all his former girlfriends if they had been diagnosed with HIV as well.

He narrowed it down to a fling he had several months earlier with a hostess at a Thai disco in Singapore. The hostess, in her 20s, vehemently denied giving him HIV when he approached her, but left the country a week later.

“It was too late to regret anything by then of course, and other than knowing where I got it from, it did very little for me,” he says.

“It’s not a death sentence now, but having HIV is still like a stain on the rest of your life,” adds Damien,

a former sales agent currently between jobs.

He says he has always been self-employed, so the leak will have no impact on his career.

“But no one will enjoy having such personal information up on the Internet.”

Damien has been single since his diagnosis because “no woman would want to be with a man with HIV”. He has told close friends about his medical condition, but his mother, who is in her 80s, remains unaware of it.

The news of the leak by American Mikhy Farrera Brochez, who used to live in Singapore, has left him feeling both angry and helpless.

“I don’t know what this American man will do with the information, and I feel like this week we have been given precious few answers to all the questions we have,” he says.

“How will this information be used? And why wasn’t this prevented in the first place?”

The past week – since the Ministry of Health (MOH) revealed that the personal details of 14,200 people with HIV were leaked – has similarly been a roller coaster of emo-

ENDLESS NIGHTMARE

It has been a horrible week. I really dread what might happen if the full list is really spread online... This data leak and how the situation has developed have made the last week feel like a nightmare that will not end.

”

JACKY (not his real name), a law student who is one of the 14,200 HIV-positive people whose data was leaked online.

tions for others diagnosed with HIV between 1985 and 2013, and who ended up on the leaked list.

Mr Dylan Goh, 29, an administrative executive in a software company, says simply that it has been “a bad week” for him.

He was diagnosed with HIV in 2009 and received the call from MOH last Tuesday.

“I had to go to work and face some pointed looks from colleagues, who had suspicions about my HIV status,” he says.

“They asked me, in front of my boss, if I was ‘one of the gays in the list’, and I tried to ignore them.”

He lives alone, and has had no contact with his relatives since his father died in 2016.

While he does not worry much about what his extended family might think, encounters with his colleagues can be awkward and “very unwelcome”.

“I think it’s very insensitive to gossip behind our backs,” says Mr Goh, who has told his boss.

He says he tried calling MOH for more information about the leak. But the hotline was always engaged, he says, even though he

made 10 calls over the last week. His friends have tried to call the line too, to ask if there were updates to the case.

“I hope more answers can be given in a timely manner. It’s very distressing, especially when we feel that information is being hidden from us – the people most affected by this data leak,” Mr Goh says.

The past week has also been extremely stressful for Jacky, a law student at a local university who is in his 20s.

“I told only my sister when I was first diagnosed with HIV back in 2013,” says Jacky (not his real name). “I had some wild teenage years, and now I’m paying the price for my bad decisions.”

He received the call when he was having brunch with a friend. It ruined his appetite, and the rest of his week.

He has been discussing with his sister how best to break the news to their father, in the event that the information is displayed on social media sites like Facebook for all to see.

“I’d rather he find out from us than from aunties and uncles sharing gossip that my full name and HIV status are on the list,” he says.

He is also worried about his career. He intends to practise law in Singapore and is afraid that his future colleagues will find his name on the list, jeopardising his future.

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Having HIV can’t get you fired but could affect chances of getting a job

Q Can companies fire HIV-positive workers?

A Under the Employment Act, employees cannot be sacked on the grounds of their HIV-positive status, says a Ministry of Manpower spokesman.

“Singapore has employment laws to protect employees from wrongful dismissal, including on the grounds of HIV,” she says. Those who have been wrongfully dismissed can seek recourse.

“The Employment Act empowers the Minister for Manpower to direct an employer to reinstate an employee who has been wrongfully dismissed in his former job and to pay the employee for the loss of income, or direct the employer to compensate the employee,” adds the spokesman.

“In the case of a unionised employee, the union may appeal to the Minister for Manpower under the Industrial Relations Act.”

Q Should companies be allowed to ask job applicants about their HIV status?

A In Singapore, the law does not prohibit it.

The Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) says no, but its directive is a mere guideline: “HIV status should not be explicitly asked for in any declaration of medical conditions and no one should be expected to declare their HIV status.”

It adds that employees should not face any repercussion if they are found to have omitted

declaring they are HIV-positive, as their HIV status should not affect their employability.

Lawyer Josephus Tan, managing director of Invictus Law Corporation, agrees, saying: “It is obviously discriminatory.”

But it depends on the job requirements, argues Mr Erman Tan, president of the Singapore Human Resources Institute. He says: “Someone in the healthcare industry would need to reveal his health status, whether it is HIV or any other illness. Companies have the right to pick anyone they want. Unfortunately, some may perceive this as being discriminatory. Many companies still adopt a very conservative culture.”

Q Can insurers void their policies if clients are found to have HIV?

A Insurance companies here have

COMPANIES HAVE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

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An Indonesian student holding a red ribbon at an awareness event to mark World Aids Day in Medan, North Sumatra, on Dec 2 last year. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

In Asia, old stigmas are proving resilient for those with virus

Jeffrey Hutton
Regional Correspondent

For Mr Verdinand Tee, 45, the stigma that can follow testing positive for HIV, hit twice.

After completing three months of a one-year contract to work as an administrative assistant in a remote corner of Afghanistan for a big international development agency, he was asked to resign. He had tested positive at a routine health check in Singapore and then was told his condition was too hazardous for a war zone.

Eighteen months later, in 2018, Mr Verdinand, an Indonesian, found out that the test result was logged in a database in his country and it raised a red flag when he tried to enter Singapore again as a tourist. He says he was eventually denied entry and put on a plane back home.

“I was treated like a criminal,” says Mr Verdinand, who now works for a Jakarta-based HIV research outfit called Network for People Living with HIV.

“It was a terrible experience.”

More than three decades since the first cases of HIV first emerged in South-east Asia, old prejudices towards those afflicted with the virus that causes Aids remain prevalent.

Education as well as cheap and effective medication have helped turn the tide on the scourge but activists say the stigma surrounding the condition has upended the lives of those living with HIV. In part, the problem centres on the lack of legal protection, the activists say.

The disease is tearing through the gay and transgender communities in Thailand, which has the highest prevalence of HIV among at-risk groups in South-east Asia.

The health services make anti-retroviral medications cheap and available, but Mr Chalermak Kittittrakul, coordinator for the Access to Medicine Campaign at the Aids Access Foundation in Bangkok, says those who carry the virus risk losing their jobs should they fail annual company health checks.

Teachers routinely bar HIV-positive children from classes. University students, testing positive, risk expulsion.

Mr Chalermak says his organisation was assisting in the case of a nursing student who was expelled from a Bangkok university after he tested positive for HIV. “Attitudes can be just as hard towards HIV-positive people in Bangkok as they are in small towns,” he says. “We don’t have the laws to protect HIV-positive people.”

To be sure, barring HIV-positive children from school is not restricted to Thailand. Late last year, the authorities in the province of North Sumatra barred three HIV-positive children from attending school, yielding to the demands of worried parents.

Cracking down on those infected with HIV can resonate with conservative communities in Indonesia. Ahead of legislative elections in the country, slated for April, politicians have used data on HIV infections as a means of whipping up anti-gay sentiment.

Local government heads in the conservative bastions of West Java, as well as in South Kalimantan, have each published the num-

bers of gay men who are HIV-positive. The data was gleaned from publicly funded local Aids councils, which are in charge of collecting data on HIV infections and overseeing treatment.

Indonesian law shields the identities of HIV-positive patients, entrusting that data with the Ministry of Health in Jakarta. Combating stigma and ensuring anonymity are key to encouraging testing and treatment for the virus, says Amsterdam-based Rico Gustav, executive director of the Global Network of People Living with HIV.

The approach is having some success. New infections in Indonesia peaked at about 70,000 in 2006 and have retreated to just over 50,000 in 2017, data collected by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids (UNAids) showed.

But roughly a fifth of gay Indonesian men who test positive for HIV either do not seek treatment or eventually stop taking their medicine in part because they fear the backlash from family members and employers if their condition is uncovered.

“Education is the key,” says Mr Gustav, who is HIV-positive.

Just how prevalent the anti-HIV stigma is throughout the region is tough to gauge. What data there is suggests that attitudes are beginning to soften in some countries.

In Vietnam, a survey by UNAids suggests that fewer people living with HIV are suffering rights violations. In 2011, more than 21 per cent of the 1,600 respondents in the survey reported some sort of stigma or discrimination. By 2015, that percentage nearly halved.

The organisation is conducting similar surveys in the Philippines and Indonesia.

But anti-HIV stigma is still proving difficult to overcome for many of those with the condition, something Mr Acep Saepudin knows all too well.

In September, the 23-year-old tested positive for HIV. A month later, he took to YouTube to tell viewers about his experience, hoping to dispel the stigma surrounding the disease.

In one video, he discusses his results. Another features a discussion with his understanding parents. The early videos drew more than two million views within weeks and a slew of encouraging comments.

Lately, though, the comments have turned venomous, some suggesting that the bespectacled university student, who hopes to graduate this year, is cursed by God. Although Mr Acep, who is gay, has not discussed his sexuality on the videos, many of those comments nevertheless disparage him. Several tell Mr Acep that he should “go and die”.

“At first the response was positive. But now there are many more bad ones,” he says.

He says his future in Indonesia is bleak. A job with the government or a company seems unlikely, given his status, says Mr Acep, who is considering emigrating.

“Maybe I can work for an NGO (non-government organisation), or start a business,” he says. “I don’t know what the future holds.”

Jeffrey Hutton

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HIV REGISTRIES IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES

MALAYSIA

The Ministry of Health established the National Aids Registry in 2009, which contains data on each HIV patient

HIV-related entry bans:

- No ban for short-term tourist stays
- Restrictions for longer-term residents

INDONESIA

The Ministry of Health runs the HIV Registry

HIV-related entry bans:

No restrictions

UNITED STATES

Each US state keeps data, including patient names, on HIV infections and reports it to the national health protection agency, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention

HIV-related entry bans:

No restrictions

AUSTRALIA

The no-names-based HIV registry is maintained by The Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales, and funded by the Department of Health.

HIV-related entry bans:

- No ban for short-term tourist stays
- Restrictions for longer-term residents

JAPAN

The Aids Surveillance Committee of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare compiles annual reports of HIV cases on a no-names basis, based on reports from all prefectures

HIV-related entry bans:

No restrictions

UNITED KINGDOM

The Department of Health and Social Care, via executive agency Public Health England runs a no-names-based HIV Registry

HIV-related entry bans:

No restrictions

Jeffrey Hutton

‘I’m not dirty even though I have HIV’

Joyce Lim
Senior Correspondent

When Adrian Tyler told his family in 2016 that he had HIV, his stepfather’s response was to tell him not to store his toothbrush in the bathroom shared by the rest of the family. His stepfather also wanted him to have a separate set of utensils.

“He also said, ‘Why didn’t you have sex with girls instead?’ He didn’t know I could get it through girls too,” recalls Mr Tyler. “My mum kept quiet.”

The 27-year-old Malay Singaporean – he officially changed his name three months ago and declines to go into the reasons or give his original name – was deeply hurt.

He had hoped for acceptance from his family.

Mr Tyler, who has an older brother and younger sister, said he does not keep in touch with his biological father and is not close to his family, but loves them.

Some solace came a few days later when Mr Tyler’s mother sent him a text message reminding him to take his medication. A small gesture as it was, it showed that she cared, he says.

It has been nearly three years since his diagnosis that he had the human immunodeficiency virus that causes Aids.

“I felt my whole world collapse. I didn’t know what my future was going to be. Are people going to accept me for who I am?” he recalls.

He can identify with the dread felt by HIV-positive individuals whose names were on the list leaked online by American Mikhy Farrera Brochez. They include 5,400 Singaporeans and permanent residents who were diagnosed up to January 2013.

Mr Tyler knows some of them. He tells The Sunday Times: “They are afraid of being discriminated at their workplaces. They are afraid of being judged and some are feeling suicidal.”

Given the shroud of stigma still surrounding the condition, few, if any, can be coaxed into sharing their stories publicly.

Their fears are justified, says Mr Tyler, recalling how he was immediately fired when his employer found out about his HIV status two years ago. He was then working as a waiter in an F&B company.

“I was working for about a month when I decided to tell my hiring manager about my HIV status. At that time, I was doing some voluntary work with Action for Aids and I thought it would be better for me to tell them in case they find any articles about me online,” says Mr Tyler.

He was summarily sacked the very

next day, via a text message from the human resource (HR) manager.

It was his first full-time job after he found out he had HIV, and he had not wanted to disclose his medical condition on the application form. The HR manager said he was fired on the grounds of dishonesty.

“No one (HIV-positive) would declare their status,” says Mr Tyler, who had quit school at 14 as he was not interested in studying.

Unable to land another full-time job after that, he worked part-time and took on various odd jobs with events companies until last month, when he secured a position as a co-ordinator for youth programmes at Action for Aids.

Three months ago, he moved out of his family’s flat to a three-room Housing Board flat where he splits the rent with a friend. But he keeps in touch with his mother.

MediFund helps to pay for his medication, which comes up to \$450 a month.

At age 17, Mr Tyler came out to his parents, telling them that he is gay. Before he was infected with the virus, he enjoyed clubbing, drinking and casual sex. But all that changed after he accompanied a friend to take an HIV test. His friend had two coupons, which could get each of them a free HIV test. “My friend’s result came out negative,” said Mr Tyler.

“Because I had gone for an anonymous test, I had to wait two weeks for a confirmation even though the initial test result showed I am positive. But at the back of my mind, I already knew I had the virus.”

On the day he received the confirmation, Mr Tyler thought of ending his life. The results dashed his self-image, his dreams of becoming a flight steward

Thai govt says sorry for toxic smog in Bangkok



Authorities start controls on cars, factories and outdoor burning

BANGKOK • The Thai government has apologised to Bangkok citizens about the air pollution that continues to disrupt their daily lives and is threatening their health.

The amount of harmful PM2.5 dust particles in the air has exceeded the safe limit in the capital and adjacent provinces almost daily since late December.

The blue sky typical of this time of year is hidden beyond a grey-yellow haze that could have serious long-term effects on health, and emotions are starting to burn along with the waste and cropland fires that contribute much to the problem.

Residents have been venting their frustration on social media, complaining about difficulty in breathing and pressing hard for the government to do more to solve the problem in a concrete manner.

The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and relevant authorities have taken some action to ease the problem in areas under heavy smog.

For instance, they are cracking down on vehicles emitting black fumes and are becoming strict with people burning fires outdoors.

Officials have also started keeping a close watch on industrial plants, ensuring there are no toxic fumes coming out of their chimneys.

Roads are being regularly hosed down and water is being sprayed in the air in the unsubstantiated hope of bringing down the dust particles.

"The government apologises for the inconvenience caused and would like to thank everybody for support and cooperation," Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said in a statement on Friday.

He also called on owners of diesel-run vehicles to use their cars in Greater Bangkok only when it is absolutely necessary.

"If possible, avoid using them until the smog eases," he advised as he agreed that the main cause of the haze could be put down to incomplete engine combustion.

Separately, Dr Siwatt Pongpiachan, director of Nida Centre Research and Development of Disaster Prevention and Management, called on the government to start handing out face masks to people living in areas hit by heavy smog.

"That's the first thing the government should do because smog is affecting people's health," he said.

Dr Siwatt also urged the government to provide people with accurate information, so they know how best to deal with the situation.

"Thailand should learn from other countries that have battled with smog before," he said.

He also believes Thailand should consider implementing the Clean Air Act and set up an Environmental Protection Agency that can efficiently manage the environment so that all Thais can enjoy clean air.

The World Health Organisation considers PM2.5 – or particulate matter that is 2.5 micron in size or smaller – as carcinogenic.

According to the Pollution Control Department (PCD), if the amount of PM2.5 exceeds 50mg per cubic metre of air, people will start experiencing health problems.

In a move to protect young children, the BMA has already ordered schools to close for two days.

Meanwhile, Siam Commercial Bank and Kasikornbank have both urged staff who are pregnant, sensitive to dust or have children to take care of to work from home.

In the meantime, operations to fight smog continued in several parts of Greater Bangkok.

Army chief Apirach Kongsompong said his forces have also actively responded to the government's policy on fighting the pollution. "People should help too. Don't just blame the government. It's everybody's duty," he said.

THE NATION/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Water being sprayed in the air from the top of a building in the hope of lowering levels of harmful PM2.5 dust particles in Bangkok. Roads are also being regularly hosed down for the same purpose. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Response to the choking pollution? Spraying jets of water

Hannah Beech
In Bangkok

The monsoons are no longer lashing Bangkok, in that soggy season when my sons sometimes have to wade through waist-high floods to get to soccer practice.

So why did I get soaked last week, as I walked along a major avenue in the Thai capital?

The liquid, which soon flooded one of Bangkok's busiest intersections, came from water cannon aimed at alleviating the smog that has shrouded Bangkok for weeks.

Some of the giant hoses were connected to trucks that only contributed to the bad air afflicting Bangkok. Smoke spewed from the trucks' exhaust pipes.

Officials from Thailand's Pollution Department estimate that vehicle emissions account for roughly 60 per cent of the city's chemical haze.

A decade ago, the Thai capital was a rarity in Asia, a place where the air had become cleaner largely because of a ban on the most polluting vehicles. Those days are gone.

Last month, Bangkok cracked the list of the top 10 cities with the foulest air on the planet.

Like many Asian megalopolises, which crowd the catalogue of the world's most polluted cities, Bangkok suffers from a toxic amalgam: unchecked industrialisation and urbanisation, a car-crazy populace and lax regulation.

The burning of fallow fields and a dry season with little wind exacerbate the crisis.

Even as pollution control monitors say they are eliminating the dirtiest diesel engines, a walk on a Bangkok road can be a choking experience. City buses belch murky smoke. There are too many cars for too few roads, and too little in-

terest in public transportation.

"In our society, a car is not just a car," said Ms Tara Buakamsri, the Thailand country director for Greenpeace South-east Asia. "It's a representation of affluence and a symbol of ownership. It will be very hard to get people to give up their cars."

The World Health Organisation says outdoor air pollution caused 4.2 million premature deaths in 2016, claiming far more lives annually than Aids, tuberculosis and malaria combined.

We moved from Beijing to Shanghai just as the air there got worse. Then we moved to Bangkok.

Like China, Thailand seems to be going through the same cycle: denial of a chronic problem, ineffectual solutions and then a sudden realisation that the chemical miasma is not going to magically disappear without coordinated policies.

Scientists agree that spraying jets of water, especially from polluting trucks, will do little to disperse Bangkok's smog.

Nor will other unorthodox methods – like water-spraying drones that have been deployed in recent days in Bangkok – fix the chronic air problem. NYTIMES

Like many Asian megalopolises, which crowd the catalogue of the world's most polluted cities, Bangkok suffers from a toxic amalgam: unchecked industrialisation and urbanisation, a car-crazy populace and lax regulation.

EXTREME WEATHER

Bitter cold eases in the United States after temperatures as low as minus 50 deg C leave 21 dead, while Queensland in Australia battles its worst floods in 100 years.

Sub-zero cold spell in US Midwest easing

CHICAGO • A brutal cold spell that paralysed the United States Midwest, freezing water mains, causing power outages and cancelling flights, has eased, with forecasts predicting a rapid thaw.

The past few days of intense cold from the so-called polar vortex that descended on the US Midwest and Northeast will go down in memory for its scenes of winter at its most bitter.

US media reported as many as 21 weather-related deaths since a snow storm hit the Midwest early last week, followed by plunging temperatures on Wednesday and Thursday. Temperature readings nosed up on Friday and "will continue to moderate", the National Weather Service said.

The concern, though, turned to the threat of flooding and further stress on already strained infrastructure as the region thawed out.

"In some areas of the Midwest, the coming wild temperature swing will be the most extreme warm-up from record winter cold ever seen in such a short-time period," Mr Jeff Masters, meteorologist at Weather Underground, told AFP.

The Arctic air mass that veered off its normal polar route broke more than 340 records in communities across a cluster of states, according to the Midwestern Regional Climate Centre. With wind chill factored in, temperatures dropped below minus 50 deg C in several states.

By tomorrow, the weather was expected to be comparatively balmy – around 10 deg C in Chicago and Detroit.

"It's important to remember that the rapid change in weather and snow melt could lead to dangerous flooding," Mr James Joseph, regional director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said in a statement.

But while the US Midwest and East Coast thawed out, a fierce winter storm was headed towards California, carrying heavy rain and high winds that could touch off city flooding and mudslides.

Though the sun was out in Los Angeles on Friday afternoon and temperatures hovered around 15 deg C, the National Weather Service (NWS) said rain would begin to fall later in the evening and continue without let-up through Saturday night.

"This is a very big storm coming through Southern California" from the eastern Pacific Ocean, said NWS meteorologist Rich Thompson.

The NWS predicted up to 7.6cm of rain in coastal and valley areas with 18cm to 20cm forecast for mountain areas. Central and Northern California were also expected to be hit by rain and high winds.

Mr Thompson said the weather service was not expecting the rain to be significant and sustained enough to cause widespread, damaging mudslides in areas left blackened and denuded of trees by major California wildfires late last year.

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, REUTERS



People wading in floodwaters in Townsville on Friday. Residents were told to leave their homes as Queensland's flood disaster looks set to worsen. PHOTOS: DPA

Queensland hit by flooding even as Australia sizzles

MELBOURNE • Once-in-a-century flooding in parts of the eastern Australian state of Queensland looks set to worsen as the nation's weather bureau warned yesterday of more heavy rain in the area.

This comes as the country endured its hottest month on record in January, with sweltering conditions expected to persist through April, according to the weather bureau.

Some residents have already been evacuated after days of monsoon rains lashed the region around the coastal city of Townsville, in the north of the state, a spokesman for the Bureau of Meteorology said.

Mr Adam Blazak, a forecaster with the bureau, did not say how many people had been evacuated, but said some areas had reached "major" flood levels. "Normally a monsoonal burst might last a few days, but this



Floodwaters at Aplins Weir in Townsville on Friday. The local authorities issued a number of flood warnings yesterday morning.

one's been going on over a week now and is set to continue for a few more days as well," he said.

The local authorities issued a number of flood warnings yester-

day morning and told residents to avoid using roads and consider moving to higher ground if conditions worsen.

North Queensland has signifi-

cant zinc reserves as well as major deposits of silver, lead, copper and iron ore, with Townsville being a major processing centre for the region's base metals.

In stark contrast, wildfires in the southern island state of Tasmania have burned through more than 187,000ha of land, fire officials said.

Mr Chris Arnold, the chief officer of the Tasmania Fire Service, said yesterday that nearly 600 personnel were working to contain the fires, some of which have been burning for weeks, destroying homes.

Mr Arnold told reporters that while the last few days have seen favourable conditions for battling the blazes, communities in part of the state were still under threat as expected hot and dry weather today could see bushfires escalate again.

REUTERS

8 dead in firefight with Abu Sayyaf militants

Philippine troops kill 3 in Sulu province as soldiers pursue those behind church blasts

MANILA • Philippine troops killed three suspected Abu Sayyaf militants and suffered five fatalities during a firefight on a remote southern island, the military said yesterday.

The clash with more than 100 members of the Abu Sayyaf group broke out in the town of Patikul in Sulu province at 11.30am local time yesterday as troops pursued those behind the Jan 27 church attack, said Colonel Gerry Besana, spokesman for the military's Western Mindanao Command.

Abu Sayyaf is a militant organisation notorious for kidnappings and

extremist factions and has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Sulu province, in the country's Mindanao region, is a known stronghold of the group.

The encounter in Patikul lasted nearly two hours, said Col Besana, with five soldiers and 15 militants also wounded.

The deadly clash in Sulu comes nearly a week after the deadly blasts that left 22 people dead in a Catholic church.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Ano said on Friday that two suicide

bombers from Indonesia were behind the church explosions in Sulu that also injured about a hundred people, with the Abu Sayyaf acting as a guide.

CNN Philippines also quoted Mr. Duterte as saying there are still some foreign terrorists in the country.

ISIS claimed responsibility for what it said were suicide bombings. Such attacks are almost unheard of in the Philippines.

The probe into the church bombings has been fraught with inconsistent and sometimes contradictory accounts from the authorities and, according to one investigator interviewed on television, complicated by a contaminated crime scene.

Security officials initially said the two bombs were detonated re-



Soldiers escorting the hearse of a church attack victim in Sulu province, Mindanao, on Wednesday. The Jan 27 blasts left 22 dead. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

motely. But by Tuesday, that changed after President Rodrigo Duterte said there may have been a suicide bomber.

Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said on Friday that bag checks at the entrance to the church would

have made it difficult to plant a bomb there, so a device strapped to the body was more likely.

Mr Lorenzana also said earlier that a Yemeni couple may have been behind the blasts.

The Philippine military last week

launched an airstrike against a splinter group from the Abu Sayyaf that it believed led the attack.

In nearby Maguindanao province, military operations have intensified in a terrorist lair, and bomber planes were used to destroy militants' bunkers.

The bombings follow a peaceful Jan 21 referendum that overwhelmingly approved autonomy for the predominantly Muslim parts of Mindanao, following a peace accord that excluded the Abu Sayyaf.

Martial law has been in place in Mindanao since domestic and foreign fighters dressed in black outfits overran Marawi City in 2017 and clung on through five months of air strikes and street battles that were reminiscent of scenes in Syria and Iraq.

The recent violence has rekindled fears about the extent of ISIS's influence in South-east Asia, and the lure of Mindanao for extremists from Malaysia, Indonesia and elsewhere.

On Wednesday, two people were killed when a grenade was thrown into a mosque in nearby Zamboanga, a mainly Christian province. It is not clear who was behind the attack. REUTERS BLOOMBERG

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Huawei faces US criminal charges over theft of robot

Chinese tech giant says staff acted on their own, but indictment cites e-mails seeking trade secrets

SEATTLE • China's Huawei Technologies couldn't take no for an answer when US wireless provider T-Mobile refused to license or sell it a robot used for testing mobile phones, so the technology giant stole it, according to a federal indictment unsealed in a Seattle court last week.

Huawei has contended that its employees were acting on their own to learn more about the robot that T-Mobile used to test smartphones, nicknamed Tappy, because it could rapidly tap a phone screen. But the indictment cites multiple e-mails exchanged between Huawei engineers urging those with access to Tappy to take increasingly precise measurements.

Eventually, the indictment says, a Huawei engineer was sneaked into the Tappy laboratory by other Huawei employees who had access. He was caught and thrown out but returned, the indictment said.

Later, after all but one Huawei employee had their access to the robot revoked, the employee took a Tappy robotic arm home for closer study, according to the indictment.

A Huawei investigation into the issue, which concluded there was minimal coordination among the engineers, contained false statements, the indictment added.

The indictment also cites a Huawei programme started in 2013 to reward employees for stealing confidential information from competitors. They were directed to post such information to an internal Huawei website, or in special cases to an encrypted e-mail address, the indictment said. Bonuses were apportioned to those who stole the most valuable information, it said.

The case has been assigned to US District Judge Ricardo Martinez.

If found guilty, Huawei faces a fine of up to US\$5 million (\$6.7 million), or three times the value of the stolen trade secret, whichever is greater.

T-Mobile had already taken Huawei to court over the incident. It settled in 2017 for US\$4.8 million after trying to claim US\$500 million in damages, with a jury ruling that Huawei misappropriated trade secrets, but had not done so wilfully or with malice. However, that was a civil case, whereas the latest indictment is a criminal one.

Huawei and Chinese technology companies more broadly have been the target of a broad US crackdown, but the charges announced last Monday mark a dramatic escalation of tensions between the world's two largest economies as they are also caught in a trade war.

BLOOMBERG, NYTIMES

TECH THIEF

Date: May 2012
From: R.Y. (Huawei USA director of technical acceptance)
To: engineers@huawei
Subject: License TMO robot

Asked about licensing or purchasing Tappy, but TMO said no. They have no plans to sell the robot system to any phone manufacturer, including Huawei.

Date: November 2012
From: J.Y. (Huawei China engineer)
To: ry@huawei
Subject: Reminder

This e-mail is just a kindly reminder for the information we need to build our own robot system and kindly feedback the information we need in the attachment...

Date: November 2012
From: R.Y. (Huawei USA employee)
To: jy@huawei
Subject: Re: FWD: Reminder

Huawei USA engineers have accessed the robot lab... They know how TMO robot works and system info. I asked them to write down the info in detail and then send to Huawei China.

Date: December 2012
From: R.Y. (Huawei USA employee)
To: jy@huawei, engineers@huawei
Subject: Follow up

We got not much information from TMO on these questions that you guys asked. Again, TMO won't want to share any more information about their robot system with us. However, we still try to find more information during our test in TMO robot lab. But won't expect any time soon.

Date: December 2012
From: J.Y. (Huawei China engineer)
To: ry@huawei, ax@huawei, usa@huawei, engineers@huawei
Subject: xDeviceRobot issues

We are still working on the Robot system and we had some issues with the system at the moment. More information on Tappy is

needed. Are software test strips optimised for each device? What is Tappy's touch speed? How is the rubbed tip installed? Is there air space in the rubber tip?

Date: March 2013
From: H.L. (Huawei USA engineer)
To: fw@huawei
Subject: Re: xDeviceRobot update

Gathering info from TMO is risky. I recommend contacting the robot manufacturer instead. Going through TMO would only backfire, especially after signing a confidentiality agreement at the TMO laboratory, the relevance of this information to us is very sensitive.

Date: April 2013
From: J.Y. (Huawei China engineer)
To: ry@huawei, ax@huawei, usa@huawei, engineers@huawei
Subject: xDeviceRobot – further difficulties

We are still not on par with TMO robot. Please send more information about calibration standards, delay calculations and software.

Date: April 2013
From: R.Y. (Huawei USA employee)
To: jy@huawei, engineers@huawei
Subject: Re: xDeviceRobot – further difficulties

First of all, I am glad that HQ R&D has been continuing to improve the Huawei robot system. Based on the test on TMO's phone, we do see a big difference of test results between TMO robot and Huawei robot.

I think we have a lot of work to improve our robot performance. The difference between the two is not only the hardware but also (most importantly) the software. TMO has spent much more money on software than hardware.

Once again, we can't get any further information about TMO robot system from TMO. They have complained to us a lot about this because we asked them too many questions of the robot based on HQ's request.

When Chinese tech giant Huawei was told it could not license or buy a phone-testing robot from US mobile services provider T-Mobile in 2012, it decided to steal the device, known as Tappy. What followed was an international corporate espionage drama that played out in internal Huawei e-mails, according to US prosecutors. The following is a snapshot of some of the exchanges:

TMO said to me that if we ask them again such questions, they won't allow us to use their robot Lab. TMO has set up a security system by putting camera into the robot Lab. I think everyone knows what this means. We can't provide any further information to HQ because we can't get anything from TMO. Once again, I suggested HQ to send an engineer to TMO for a hands-on experience by playing the robot system. I believe this would give HQ robot team a huge benefit in understanding TMO robot system from hardware and software, as well as operation.

Date: April 2013
From: Huawei USA Executive Director of Technical Acceptance
To: jy@huawei, ry@huawei, engineers@huawei
Subject: Re: Re: Re: xDeviceRobot – further difficulties

Access to Tappy by our engineers on the ground is strictly controlled. They are limited to usage of TMO's robot, and everything else is categorically denied.

Due to answering headquarters' questions, our employees have had two complaints raised against them, and it was declared that if we inquired again, Huawei's credentials for using the TMO Robot Laboratory would end. I echo previous suggestions to send an engineer from headquarters to see Tappy in person.

Date: April 2013
From: F.W. (Huawei China engineer)
To: Huawei USA Executive Director of Technical Acceptance
Subject: Trip to Washington

There are a number of goals for my trip to T-Mobile HQ, but mainly – Collect detailed technical data on Tappy hardware and software. Take photos and videos.

For the mechanical arm issues, go to the laboratory for reconnaissance and obtain measurement data.

I expect to arrive in Washington on May 11.

Date: May 2013
From: F.W. (Huawei China engineer)
To: engineers@huawei, usa@huawei, Director of Device Testing Management Department
Subject: Reconnaissance

A.X. has let me into the Tappy laboratory twice over the past few days. Both times we were discovered by a T-Mobile employee and I was asked to leave, since I wasn't allowed to be there. I observed the robot on both visits and took pictures on the second.

I went once more today to TMO's mechanical arm testing laboratory and gained an overall understanding of the test environment. I summarised it, please take a look at the attached document and pictures. TMO has made it clear that I am not allowed to re-enter the robot laboratory. Going forward, A.X. will help you get a deeper understanding of the remaining information.

Date: May 2013
From: T-Mobile partner relations
To: usa@huawei
Subject: Return all badges immediately

Due to recent and repeated violations of T-Mobile's on-site rules, Huawei USAs access to the Tappy laboratory has been revoked. All Huawei USA employees must return their badges to T-Mobile, with the exception of A.X., who will be the only Huawei USA employee with access to the testing facilities.

This is only so Huawei can complete limited testing on in-progress projects.

Date: May 2013
From: F.W. (Huawei China engineer)
To: engineers@huawei, jy@huawei, ax@huawei
Subject: Re: Robot arm

A.X. was able to remove the robot arm from the laboratory without being detected and I took exact measurements. However, TMO quickly discovered the arm was missing and A.X. was forced to return the part the following day. A.X. told them it was taken by mistake. Our access to the lab has been completely revoked and Huawei USA employees are no longer allowed inside the facility unsupervised.

I've attached detailed measurements of the arm. See pictures for details.



PHOTO: BLOOMBERG SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

Trump to offer ‘visionary’ path for US in State of the Union address

WASHINGTON • President Donald Trump intends to offer an “aspirational” and “visionary” path forward for the nation in his State of the Union address on Tuesday, White House aides said, even as his relations with lawmakers have soured over his threats to use executive powers to bypass them.

In his third prime-time address to the nation from the House chambers, Mr Trump will call on Congress to work with him on new initiatives around infrastructure and healthcare, while also reaffirming his strategy to toughen immigration enforcement, confront China on trade and actively intervene in

the political upheaval in Venezuela, aides said in previewing the speech on Friday.

Mr Trump will make an appeal for bipartisan support, the aides said, despite the heightened acrimony in the nation's capital as the White House engaged in a fierce stand-off with Democrats over the President's efforts to build a border wall.

The speech comes after Mr Trump began his third year in office last month during a partial government shutdown that ended only after he set a Feb 15 ultimatum to get his wall – with a threat to declare a national emergency if he is rebuffed.

“Together we can break decades of political stalemate,” Mr Trump plans to say, according to an excerpt of his prepared remarks offered by a senior administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity. “We can bridge old divisions, heal old wounds, build new coalitions, forge new solutions and unlock the extraordinary promise of America's future. The decision is ours to make.”

Earlier on Friday, Mr Trump was coy about his plans for a potential national emergency, which advisers have said could allow him to redirect some Pentagon funding to build the wall on the US-Mexico border.

“I don't want to say,” Mr Trump said at a midday photo op, when asked about that possibility. “You'll hear the State of the Union, and let's see what happens.”

The President intends to highlight his immigration agenda, the senior administration official said, but the speech is not intended as a sweeping jeremiad on that singular topic.

The aide described the address, in length and tone, as in line with traditional State of the Union speeches from Mr Trump.

Among the key points, the President intends to call on lawmakers to ratify the US-Mexico-Canada

free trade agreement that his administration signed last year.

The President will also discuss his national security and foreign policy initiatives, including his “determination to bring an end to US foreign wars”, the official said.

Mr Trump's speech had been scheduled for Jan 29, but House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat, called it off because the shutdown was under way, leading to an angry response from the President, who denied her and several other Democrats access to a military plane to visit US troops in Afghanistan.

Ms Stacey Abrams, the former mi-

nority leader of the Georgia House of Representatives who narrowly lost a gubernatorial race last autumn, is slated to deliver the Democratic rebuttal to Mr Trump.

A joint negotiating committee on Capitol Hill is trying to work out a new spending deal to keep the government open past Feb 15, when the three-week continuing resolution that ended the shutdown is set to expire.

Ms Pelosi has said there will be no money for a wall in any deal, and in an interview with The New York Times on Thursday, Mr Trump called the talks a “waste of time”.

WASHINGTON POST

Good for



me



my environment



Every day, we make choices that have an impact on our environment. There are many opportunities for us to make a difference. Every action, big or small, plays a part.

Here are how some everyday individuals and businesses do what is good for themselves and the environment.

Learn more at cgs.sg/environmentandus

UPCYCLING PLAYTIME

Sophia Huang

EDITOR, WRITER, FULL-TIME MUM

"I try not to buy toys for my children. I would rather make them with upcycled materials. It teaches them the importance of working with their hands and helps ignite their imagination. Just as importantly, it helps reduce general waste. It's appalling how much trash our household can go through each week. So, I don't like to just throw something away without at least thinking about what else it can be used for."

I first got into upcycling after I had my first child. Before that, I had no idea just how expensive children's toys could be! My first major project was a kitchen playset I made from cardboard for my daughter, which cost me just \$6 and a little of my time.

Ever since I started this with my kids, it has led me to more initiatives involving children and the environment. Now I run a Facebook page to teach other parents how to do what I do, I write children's books about human relationships with nature, and I give school talks to try and instil a love for nature in the young. I hope the future generation will learn to love creating and not just consuming."

View her upcycling tips at:
fb.com/CraftcycleForKids



Share the right values

Waste less

Pursue your passion

Reduce plastic waste



Lim Wei Jie

FOUNDER OF FOREWORD COFFEE

A TASTE OF PASSION

"While I run a coffee company, I see no point in my passion for coffee unless I can do something worthwhile with it. That's the thought that led me to thinking about my business beyond being a conventional coffee joint, and kickstarted the various schemes that support my passion, my business and the environment."

At Foreword Coffee, we have a Bring Your Own Cup policy; rewarding customers with 10% off their beverages. We also stopped giving out straws, switching to using sustainable coffee lids instead.

This might not seem like much, but considering how we dispose of tons of plastic daily, it is still a better alternative than adding to the problem. Most of these plastic items just go into incinerators, adding to the greenhouse gas effect. What's worse, is how they might even end up in our environment! At the end of the day, I hope that with each cup of coffee we serve, we'll be able to change everyday habits and help everyone do their bit for the environment."

Learn more about his coffee company at:
ForewordCoffee.com
fb.com/ForewordCoffee

THE HIDDEN TRUTH

Pei Shan Yeo | Augustine Tan

CO-FOUNDERS OF UGLYFOOD

"When my Grandma fell ill, I discovered a hidden truth. That for years, I've been wasting perfectly edible food. It was only then that I started researching about healthy diets for my grandmother, and discovered how 'ugly' foods are often being thrown away. That's a huge waste of the natural resources it took to produce them in the first place. Even when they are perfectly edible and as nutritious as other more aesthetically pleasing food."

Together with my partner, Augustine, we researched further into this cosmetic filtering, and realised this massive waste of food could be turned into a business opportunity. It's a chance for us to do our part in reducing food waste here – which has increased by about 40% in the last 10 years, and is expected to continue to do so.

Through working with established mentors in the F&B industry, we developed a range of healthy recipes to transform 'ugly' food into beautiful yet delectable products. First, we started with juices. Now we've expanded to ice creams and fruit teas as well, and we don't plan to stop until everyone starts seeing the beauty in 'ugly' food."

Follow their ventures at:
UglyFood.com.sg
fb.com/UglyFoodCo

Discover wholesome recipes

Reduce food waste



Clean & Green
Singapore



cgs.sg/environmentandus

Plans afoot to help make walking more convenient

More sheltered walkways, greenery and rest stops among things being looked into, says Janil Puthucheary

Adrian Lim
Political Correspondent

Lack of convenience is the main reason why commuters do not walk more, but transport planners are hoping to coax them to use their legs, by exploring ways to make walking more enjoyable.

Besides building sheltered walkways, planting more greenery and having rest stops, as well as things to look at and do along the way, are some of the possibilities being looked into, Senior Minister of State for Transport Janil Puthucheary told The Sunday Times in a recent interview.

“We want to find ways that we can re-engineer our towns, our roads, (and) roadside spaces to make walking more pleasant for people and give people the choice to walk as an option,” he said.

Dr Puthucheary, who was appointed to the Transport Ministry in May last year, said it was about giving people a choice, as individual commuters have different walking preferences.

“What is a 10-minute walk for one person may feel like a much longer journey for someone else,” he added.

So whether it is to improve last-mile connectivity to a bus stop or train station, or to encourage a longer stroll to the neighbourhood centre, town planners would like people to be able to do either, he said.

While he declined to give more details of what this might entail, Dr Puthucheary cited London – which he visited three months ago on a study trip – as an example of a city trying to re-imagine its land transport system, and turning to walking as a means to improve the health of Londoners and reduce pollution from motor vehicles.

Last July, the British capital launched its first Walking Action Plan, through which streets will be designed, built and managed to support people walking, with new infrastructure, better signposting and maps, and more pedestrian crossings.

Closer to home, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) recently concluded a five-month public consultation exercise to gather public views on how “Walk Cycle Ride” can be the preferred choice for commuters, instead of private cars.

“Walk Cycle Ride”, as defined by the authority, comprises mass transport modes like buses and trains, active mobility such as walking and cycling, and point-to-point transport options like car-sharing, taxis and private-hire cars.

The feedback gathered from more than 7,000 Singaporeans will help the LTA to draw up the Land Transport Master Plan (LTMP) 2040, Singapore’s land transport blueprint for the next two decades.

Dr Puthucheary, who chairs an advisory panel that will submit a recommendation report to the Government later this month, said commuters gave suggestions on reclaiming spaces from vehicles, such as roads and carparks, for community uses.

Ideas included building more “car-lite” towns and pedestrianised streets, or closing streets to traffic

during off-peak hours for cycling or shared paths, he said.

Such ideas are already in germination in various quarters: Planners have identified five areas, such as Bayshore and Kampong Bugis, as car-lite precincts where walking, cycling and riding personal mobility devices will be made more convenient. New towns like Tengah are also being designed to have a lower percentage of road space.

In the last five years, the LTA has built 200km of covered walkways around the island, linking transport nodes and key amenities, at a cost of \$300 million.

In an online survey of over 1,200 commuters as part of the LTMP consultation, more than nine in 10 expect that by 2040, it will take 20 minutes or less to travel from home to the nearest neighbourhood centre for activities such as shopping, eating or banking.

Asked why people may not be walking more, Dr Puthucheary said it boils down to convenience.

He said towns would have to be re-engineered to make walking easier and more convenient, with more connected pathways to save time for commuters.

Asked if the Government had plans to reduce the population of motor vehicles to further nudge commuters towards “Walk Cycle Ride”, he said this was not one of the recommendations that emerged from the public consultation.

Since February last year, the growth of the motor vehicle population has been capped.

Dr Puthucheary said: “There’s a role for the car... the question is, how do we make better use of the cars that we have in Singapore.”

“You have the car (that) is available as an asset to a number of people, whether it’s a number of people at the same time or a number of people across the day,” he said, alluding to services such as carpooling, car-sharing and private-hire vehicles.

The backbone of the “Walk Cycle Ride” efforts will continue to be the rail system, because it has the largest carrying capacity and fastest throughput, he added.

One full-load train can have as many as 1,600 passengers during peak hours, arriving at intervals of two minutes. This means an hourly load can hit 48,000. In comparison, it would take more than 500 buses to carry the same number of people in the same amount of time.

But there are trade-offs, Dr Puthucheary said. Allocating more of the budget to building new rail lines where there is demand means less going to education and health-care, for instance.

Noting that it is a “very real trade-off”, he said: “We need to be prudent as building new rail lines is costly. It will only become costlier as we build under more challenging conditions – navigating more built-up areas and a more crowded underground space.”

Nanyang Technological University senior research fellow Gopinath Menon said Singapore’s pedestrian infrastructure has vastly improved over the last few decades.

“Almost every road in Singapore has a footpath today, and that’s



Above: In the last five years, the LTA has built 200km of covered walkways islandwide. Below: Planners have identified five areas as car-lite precincts where walking, cycling and riding personal mobility devices will be made more convenient. PHOTOS: ST FILE, CHONG JUN LIANG



MORE PLEASANT OPTION

We want to find ways that we can re-engineer our towns, our roads, (and) roadside spaces to make walking more pleasant for people and give people the choice to walk as an option.



SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT JANIL PUTHUCHEARY (left).

MAKE BETTER USE OF CARS

There’s a role for the car... the question is, how do we make better use of the cars that we have in Singapore. You have the car (that) is available as an asset to a number of people, whether it’s a number of people at the same time or a number of people across the day.



DR PUTHUCHEARY

something to be proud of, but more improvements can be made,” he noted.

Footpaths can be made wider than the 1.5m minimum width in places where possible, he noted. Where needed, raised zebra crossings can be implemented at more minor road crossings, which convey to motorists that pedestrians have priority. These would make the walking experience smoother.

Pedestrian overhead bridges should all be equipped with lifts, or they may risk being underutilised, he added. Ramps for such bridges are an option too, but some can be long and winding, he noted.

Mr Menon said ideas worth exploring are “skyways”, which are walkways above the street level that connect nearby buildings. This has been done in Jurong East, with link bridges connecting shopping malls, a hospital and the Employment and Employability Institute.

But can Singapore get more people to take to walking, like in cities such as London?

“The weather has a big part to play,” said Mr Menon. Singapore can study Japan’s extensive underground walking links in its train network, giving people more connections to the rail stations, he noted.

“The moment you are in an underpass, psychologically, there’s a feeling you are already in the train station,” he noted.

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Expect heavy traffic at land checkpoints ahead of Chinese New Year

Rahimah Rashith

Motorists can expect long queues at the Causeway over the Chinese New Year period, with some travellers reporting delays of more than three hours before clearing Malaysian Customs on Friday.

Traffic is likely to build up even more in the coming days.

Designer Kelvin Tan, 30, who drove his family to Johor Baru on Friday evening to visit relatives, told The Sunday Times: “We left after 8pm but were stuck in a bad traffic jam for almost four hours. It was so packed, everything came to a standstill.”

Madam Sarah Ong was also unprepared for such a massive jam as she left her home at 5am yesterday.

“I expected that there would be a slight delay with the traffic, but I did not expect to wait more than three hours to cross the Causeway and clear Customs even in the early hours,” said the 52-year-old housewife.

With many Malaysian workers heading home for the extended holiday period, some set off early to avoid the rush but the congestion

was so bad that some bus passengers reportedly decided to alight and walk across the kilometre-long Causeway instead.

There are more than 400,000 Malaysians living and working in Singapore.

The Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) said it had opened all departure counters in anticipation of this peak period.

From Friday afternoon, ICA has been posting hourly updates online of the traffic situation at Singapore’s two land checkpoints, Tuas and Woodlands, with most updates warning of heavy traffic.

At 6pm last night, travelling time across the Causeway was estimated to be 45 minutes.

At 9.05pm, the ICA said on Face-

book that the departure traffic at the two checkpoints was smooth although a “backflow of traffic from Malaysia at Woodlands checkpoints remains”.

It advised travellers to check the OneMotoring website before embarking on their journeys.

On a regular weekday, it is estimated that more than 50,000 vehicles use the two crossings – with even more on weekends – making it one of the busiest borders in the region.

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Better **JOURNEYS**

While most journeys are fairly routine, cabbies and private-hire drivers sometimes find themselves taken for a ride

Driving me crazy

BRYANT CHAN

The next time you get in a cab or a private-hire car, bear in mind that while your journey may take just 20 minutes, your driver spends his day in the car. Your only job as a passenger is to sit comfortably, while your driver negotiates Singapore traffic as best as he can, day in and day out.

A quick glance at various Facebook groups would give you a feel of the challenges faced by private-hire drivers. These include rude passengers, last-minute cancellations and long waiting times before the passengers show up at their designated pick-up point.

We spoke with drivers to learn more about their jobs. Here are some of their more eyebrow-raising experiences.

Going with the flow



POSED PHOTO: ISTOCK

He started driving for Uber in January last year, hoping to earn a modest income. He never expected showers of gold.

But just two weeks into the job, the driver, who is in his 40s, found himself in a challenging situation. He was trapped in heavy traffic with a mother and child in the back seat, and he heard the words that drivers dread: “Mummy, I need to *shee-shee*.”

Before he could react, he heard a reply that was even more horrifying than the child’s plea: “Okay, just *shee-shee* here.”

He couldn’t believe his ears. It was a relatively short ride – from Toa Payoh to Kallang – surely a toilet break could wait?

Nonetheless, Mr Chua, who asked that we not use his real name, dutifully drove the duo to their destination. The mother gave him a cursory thanks and walked away with her child, who appeared to be about six years old.

When they were out of sight, Mr Chua got out of his car to assess the damage. There was a suspicious wet patch on the rear passenger seat. He had to drive to a nearby petrol kiosk and fork out \$20 for the seat to be cleaned.

The soft-spoken driver admits he was too flustered to do anything at the time. “What could I do? I was still very new.”

In retrospect, he thinks the mother had a piece of cloth with her to absorb the pee.

Nonetheless, he is less irked by the fact that the child urinated in his car – he understands that some children can’t hold it in – than the fact that she didn’t even ask for his permission.

“Is this how you raise the next generation, that you can just pee in someone else’s car?” He shakes his head in disappointment. “The most basic courtesy would be to at least ask for permission.”

Mr Chua now rents a car with leather seats and keeps a secret weapon in it: a plastic bag for “emergencies”.



Mr Salim Hashim recounts his experiences with fare-dodgers. PHOTO: BRYANT CHAN

Drive and dash

Mr Salim Hashim has learnt to pick his battles after driving for 31 years.

He admits he used to be famously confrontational. But he adds that he was a younger man back then, one who was in ‘better shape and who had one less heart attack under his belt.

Still, there is one group of passengers he has never been able to tolerate.

He and all of his colleagues have had their fair share of drive-and-ditch passengers – those who immediately dash off without paying once they’ve reached their destination.

The main culprits tend to be schoolchildren, he says. “Sometimes you can tell that they’re going to be trouble just by their body language.”

While some run off at full pelt, others are more devious. One passenger, claiming to have no money in his wallet, said he would go up to his flat to get cash.

Mr Salim waited and waited. The passenger didn’t return. Ten minutes turned into 20 minutes, which became half an hour. Mr Salim decided he couldn’t wait any longer and left.

While most are children, Mr Salim’s most memorable fare-dodger was in 2009: a man in

suit and tie, and clutching an expensive-looking leather briefcase, heading to Balmoral Gardens.

When Mr Salim pulled up outside the condo, the man passed him a company card. “Uncle, I have no money now, so tomorrow you can come look for me at my office,” he said, before leaving.

Mr Salim didn’t even bother trying to chase after him. At 66 years old, he’s decided it’s just easier to let them go.

Of course he incurs a loss – a passenger who doesn’t pay doesn’t just waste his time, he explains. It’s litres of fuel he will never get back, as well as the opportunity cost of not having picked up a paying passenger.

“They know diesel isn’t free,” he says. “They know rental isn’t free. But for some reason, they will still try to cheat you.”

But there is little recourse for fare-dodgers who flag down cabs on the street rather than booking through an app. There’s nothing Mr Salim can do about it, and the sooner he reminds himself of that fact, the easier it is to deal with it.

“I just take it that it’s not my lucky day,” he says with a shrug.

They’ve got the power

Some drivers leave bottled water in the back seat for their passengers, while others leave candy for a sweeter ride.

In the same vein, Grab driver Westin Chong, 39, used to leave his powerbank in the cupholder of his car for passengers to charge their devices. Most were grateful for the extra juice. Some would even commend him for his consideration.

But one particular middle-aged rider seemed to take offence at Mr Chong’s charity.

“Don’t you know someone could steal this?” the passenger had asked, brandishing the powerbank.

As it turns out, the passenger used to be a private-hire driver himself, who also used to offer passengers a cable to charge their devices – until it was stolen.

Mr Chong told his passenger that it was a risk he was willing to take, as long as it made his passengers happy.

“How much do you earn from driving?” the passenger demanded.

When Mr Chong explained that he was also a part-time tuition teacher, the passenger berated him – in a mix of Hokkien and English – for stealing jobs from people who “rightfully deserve” them by holding two jobs at the same time.

“It’s your fault that society is turning out like this,” he spat, jabbing Mr Chong with an admon-



POSED PHOTO: BRYANT CHAN

ishing finger.

His heart pounding, Mr Chong quickly drove the aggravated passenger to his destination. But that was not enough for the passenger. “I’m taking this powerbank,” he shouted, and took off with it.

Mr Chong was so shocked that he didn’t fully process that he had been robbed until five minutes later. Still in a daze, he drove to the nearest police station and filed a report.

Although reluctant to provide another powerbank, Mr Chong is considering getting a USB car charger for his passengers’ use in the future.

RIDES AND WRONGS

Being on the road for long hours and picking up strangers can lead to less-than-ideal encounters. What are some situations taxi and private-hire vehicle drivers face?	Don’t kid around Some parents travelling with young children book regular ride-hailing vehicles to get lower fares, foregoing safer options like GrabFamily which provides a booster or toddler car seat. Under the Road Traffic Act, it is illegal for cars to carry passengers shorter than 1.35m without a booster seat or a child restraint. Private-hire drivers who flout this rule face a fine of \$120 and three demerit points. If charged in court, they can be fined up to \$1,000 or jailed up to three months. Taxis are exempted from this regulation.	Strap in Adult passengers who don’t belt up risk a \$120 fine, with stricter penalties if they are charged in court. Drivers who do not ensure their passengers wear a seatbelt will also be penalised \$120 and three demerit points.	Tick-tock Time is money. The minutes spent waiting for passengers add up to a few extra trips a driver could make every day. While taxi passengers are charged 22 to 25 cents for every 45-second wait, ride-hailing passengers enjoy a grace period of up to five minutes. Beyond this, Grab drivers can charge \$3 for every additional five-minute wait.	Punching bag Passengers can get abusive. In May 2017, a taxi driver was punched in the eye by his passenger for allegedly driving to the wrong destination. The passenger kept changing his mind about his destination, before launching a verbal and physical attack on his driver. To ensure safety during ride-hailing journeys, the Grab app has an emergency button that alerts Grab Security or pre-assigned emergency contacts if riders or drivers sense they are in danger.	Lone star Ratings are in place to build a culture of better service from both drivers and riders. But unhappy passengers sometimes give drivers a bad rating for things beyond their control, like being stuck in a jam. This affects the drivers’ overall rating, which could disqualify them from certain incentives.
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East Coast furniture shop razed

No injuries reported; SCDF investigating the cause of the fire

Goh Yan Han

A fire engulfed a furniture shop at 135 Upper East Coast Road early yesterday morning.

The Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) said in a series of Facebook posts that it had been alerted to a fire at the furniture shop at 3.33am.

Eleven emergency vehicles and about 35 firefighters were involved. At one point, five water jets were used to get the fire under control.

"The fire which involved contents of a furniture shop was extinguished in about two hours. Damping-down operations are ongoing," said the SCDF.

Residents who had been evacuated by the police and the SCDF as a safety precaution were allowed to return to their homes. There were no reported injuries and the SCDF is investigating the cause of the fire.

Mr Roysten Estrop, 68, was awoken by his wife at 3.45am as she thought something in their house was burning, due to the strong smell of smoke. Smoke had entered their house from their daughter's bedroom window. The retiree, who lives in the nearby Tay Lian Teck Road, said: "From my house, I could see a huge reflection of the fire on the windows of the condominium opposite."

When he went to the scene of the fire, he found that the road had been cordoned off, with some people gathered outside. "The flames were going four to five storeys high," said Mr Estrop. "But it was too dark and far away to tell if there was anyone from the shop inside or around the building."

The main shop sold furniture such as bamboo blinds and he used to purchase items from it, he said. A small space on the land was also rented to a photo framing shop.

In December, a fire broke out at a single-storey furniture warehouse in Sungei Kadut and 25 emergency vehicles and about 90 firefighters were deployed.

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Above: A fire engulfed a furniture shop at 135 Upper East Coast Road early yesterday morning.

Left: The SCDF said that the fire was extinguished in about two hours. PHOTOS: LIANHE WANBAO READER

MP wins praise for fire safety video done in Hokkien

A two-minute Facebook video on fire safety tips by Ms Sun Xueling, an MP for Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC, has been receiving praise after she posted it on Thursday.

In the video, the Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Home Affairs and National Development gives fire safety tips to prevent home fires – in fluent Hokkien.

The video focuses on three messages: not to stand too close to the stove when cooking; not to leave cooking unattended; and to ensure there are no smouldering embers before disposing of lighted materials.

Online comments praised her mastery of the dialect, as well as the effort put into producing the video.

Ms Sun, who is Hokkien, told The Sunday Times yesterday that the video was made DIY (do-it-yourself) style, involving only three people: herself, an administrative staff member from the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) who was featured in the video, and an SCDF firefighter who doubled as cameraman and video editor.

Ms Sun said that as Chinese New Year is approaching, and there were two home fires recently in Punggol and Pasir Ris, she wanted to put out a message on fire safety to warn residents – and hence she approached the SCDF.

"They told me that they had a firefighter who could do the recording, so we could do it together. I was pleasantly surprised that he also knew how to do motion graphics," said Ms Sun, 39.

Filming took two hours last Monday morning at a Punggol resident's home, while the editing and graphics, done by the firefighter, took another one to two days. The script was written by Ms Sun.

The MP said they did not use professional video cameras or microphones and relied on a small handheld camera.

"We had a lot of problems with recording the sound at first as we were filming parts of it outdoors, and for the kitchen scene, when we played it back, the sound of the cooking was louder than me and I couldn't hear myself," she said.

The team improvised by using a mobile phone and an earpiece to get better audio quality.

Ms Sun has been carrying out community engagements with her residents on fire safety and wanted to step up the engagements as the bulk of fires in residential homes was caused by unattended cooking or rubbish chute fires. There were 2,008 fires reported in residential premises across Singapore in the first 10 months of last year.

She decided to narrate the video in Hokkien and put in English and Chinese subtitles in order to reach out to as wide an audience as possible.

"If I did it only in English and Mandarin, I would miss out on an audience group, particularly the elderly, who during Chinese New Year would be doing a lot of cooking. I've seen for myself my own grandmother's shirt catching fire while cooking, so it is a real danger," said Ms Sun.

When asked about her choice to use Hokkien, given the Government's dialect policy, she said: "The importance of language is the ability to communicate with the target audience. I wanted simple advisory points to go out to an audience group whom I didn't want neglected because of language."

Ms Sun said she was not sure how many elderly people used Facebook, but knew that her followers were mostly her young residents. Hence in her Facebook post, she explicitly asked viewers to show the video to their parents or grandparents.

As at 11.30am yesterday, her video had about 27,000 views on Facebook and 285 shares.

This is not the first time Ms Sun has been featured in a video related to safety. In August last year, she posted a Facebook video of a step-by-step guide on what to do in the event of an infant cardiac arrest or choking incident, which has garnered about 75,000 views to date.

Goh Yan Han

110 arrested for suspected loan-shark activities in islandwide sweep

Tee Zhuo

The police nabbed 110 people around the island for suspected involvement in loan-shark activities over three days last month.

The 80 men and 30 women, aged 18 to 68, were arrested in an operation conducted from Jan 28 to 30.

Officers from the Criminal Investigation Department and seven land divisions conducted simultaneous raids at various locations.

Preliminary investigations showed that 15 suspects may have carried out ATM transfers on behalf of loan sharks.

One other suspect is believed to have provided false contact information in order to obtain loans.

The remaining 94 may have opened bank accounts and given away their ATM cards and personal identification numbers to loan sharks to facilitate unlicensed moneylending businesses.

Opening a bank account, distributing pamphlets, acting as a lookout, being a runner or acting as a harasser for loan sharks are criminal activities that have serious consequences, such as a hefty fine, jail term and even caning, police say.

Under the Moneylenders Act, when a bank account or ATM card

of any person is used to facilitate moneylending by an unlicensed moneylender, that person is presumed to have assisted in unlicensed moneylending.

Those convicted of the above for the first time may be fined between \$30,000 and \$300,000, jailed for up to four years, and get up to six strokes of the cane.

If convicted of acting on behalf of an unlicensed moneylender, committing or attempting to commit acts of harassment, offenders can be jailed for up to five years, fined \$5,000 to \$50,000 and caned between three and six strokes.

Those convicted of providing

false contact information to obtain loans from loan sharks can be jailed for up to 12 months. Under the National Registration Act, a person found guilty of failing to report a change of address can be jailed on conviction for up to five years, fined up to \$5,000, or both.

The police also said they had observed a rise in foreign workers borrowing from both licensed and unlicensed moneylenders.

"Employers of foreign workers and maid agencies are urged to engage and remind foreign workers to stay away from loan sharks and not to work with or assist the loan sharks in any way," the police said.

They warned that foreign workers involved in unlicensed moneylending activities will be dealt with firmly under Singapore's laws and have their work passes revoked.

They added that foreign workers who borrow from unlicensed moneylenders may also be barred from working in Singapore.

"The police will continue to take tough enforcement action against those involved in the loan-shark business, regardless of their roles, and they will face the full brunt of the law," the police said.

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FairPrice raises \$38k for ST fund

Shabana Begum

FairPrice donated \$38,000 to aid beneficiaries of The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund (STSPMF) on Thursday.

The amount was raised through FairPrice's "One FairPrice Family" initiative, where donations were made when the retailer's management and corporate employees volunteered at outlets during the busy Chinese New Year period.

For every hour FairPrice's chairman and board members volunteered, \$88 was donated, while \$8 was donated for every hour FairPrice's senior management and staff from its headquarters volunteered.

FairPrice's management and corporate employees volunteered for 4,000 hours during the festive season.

Its chief executive Seah Kian Peng and chairman Bobby Chin presented \$38,000 to STSPMF at FairPrice Xtra @ Ang Mo Kio Hub. Student beneficiaries of the fund present were also given \$38 each to purchase groceries.

"We wanted to actively engage our staff in contributing to help the student beneficiaries supported by STSPMF through teamwork and empathy," said Mr Seah. "Together with our community, we believe that every child deserves to be provided with an equal opportunity to develop his full potential."

nshab@sph.com.sg



FairPrice chairman Bobby Chin shopping with Cayden Chong, 10, a beneficiary of The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund, and Cayden's mother, Madam Angelia Chia, 28, at FairPrice Xtra @ Ang Mo Kio Hub on Thursday. FairPrice donated \$38,000 to the fund, raised through its "One FairPrice Family" initiative, and beneficiaries present were given \$38 each to purchase groceries. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



Mr Lim Ruiliang was riding his motorcycle last Monday when he was hit by a private bus near 59 Gul Road. His family is appealing for eye-witnesses and also wants the bus firm to explain the accident. PHOTO: SG ROAD VIGILANTE/FACEBOOK

Family reeling from two sons' deaths in span of 2 months

Motorcyclist killed in accident last week; younger brother died in his sleep in Nov

Shabana Begum

A week after a 37-year-old motorcyclist was killed in a traffic accident in Tuas, his grief-stricken family is still looking for answers.

Mr Lim Ruiliang, a machine maintenance worker at Tuas Naval Base, was believed to have been on his way home from work when he was hit by a private bus last Monday.

The police said they were alerted to the accident near 59 Gul Road at 5.32pm that day.

For the Lim family, the accident came exactly two months after Mr Lim's 34-year-old brother died in his sleep on Nov 28 last year.

The family was still reeling from this sudden death when it lost Mr Lim too, said his sister, Ms Lim Ruifen.

Ms Lim, 33, is the youngest sibling and her parents' only surviving offspring.

When the family was notified of the accident at 7pm last Monday, Mr Lim's wife, Ms Lim's husband and cousin rushed to the scene.

The green private bus was parked some distance away, but it was empty and the driver was nowhere to be seen, said Mr Lim's sister.

She is appealing for eyewitnesses to come forward with videos or descriptions of what happened, and the family wants the private bus company to explain the accident.

"I have no idea if the accident



Mr Lim, a machine maintenance worker in Tuas, was believed to have been on his way home when the accident occurred. PHOTO: FACEBOOK

was my brother's fault or the bus driver's fault. But no matter who was at fault, the death still happened," she told The Sunday Times on Friday at the wake for her brother in Yishun.

"The bus driver or the company should have paid their last respects. But there was nothing. Not even a phone call."

The police are investigating the accident.

Mr Lim is survived by a daughter, who is in primary school, and a son, who is nearly one year old.

The main priority of the family is to provide support and assistance to his wife and her children, said Ms Lim.

"My mum had been taking care of the children when their parents were at work, but the treatment now will be slightly different, because they have no father. The love

for them will be even stronger."

After her second brother's death last November, her parents decided they would not be celebrating the Chinese New Year and there will be no reunion dinner this year.

Mr Lim's sister said her parents, who are both above 60 years old, are heartbroken and disappointed as no one from the private bus company has contacted them to explain what happened.

A few days ago, she received a message from a Chinese-language newspaper that someone wanted to make a donation to the family. Her parents said no.

"It is not about money. At the end of the day, we need to know what happened because we want answers for my late brother."

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Pregnant mum among 117 suspected drug offenders nabbed

Tee Zhuo

She was three months pregnant and had a 10-month-old toddler running a high fever when the authorities caught her taking the drug Ice.

The Singaporean woman was one of 117 suspected drug offenders arrested by the authorities in an 11-day operation that ended on Friday morning.

The Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) said that drugs with a street value of about \$52,000 were seized during the operation which began on Jan 21.

They included Ice, heroin, cannabis, Erimin-5 tablets, Ecstasy tablets, ketamine and new psychoactive substances.

The CNB operation, which was assisted by the police, covered areas including Bedok, Buangkok, Bukit Batok, Commonwealth, Jurong, Pasir Ris, Serangoon, Tampines and Yishun.

The 31-year-old mother was arrested on Thursday with her 36-year-old partner near Balestier Road, the CNB said.

They had been moving frequently from one hotel to another to evade arrest.

The toddler was taken to the hospital.

The drug Ice and various drug paraphernalia were recovered from the room rented by the couple, the CNB added.

In another case, a 31-year-old Singaporean man was arrested near Toa Payoh Lorong 1 on Jan 23.

Officers recovered about 84g of Ice, many empty plastic sachets, a digital weighing scale and drug-taking equipment from the residential unit where he was found.

Investigations are continuing.

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Breaking with CNY tradition – with a passport

More Singaporeans spending Chinese New Year overseas

Vanessa Liu

Eat lots of bak kwa and pineapple tarts. Watch reruns of Stephen Chow's *God Of Gamblers II* on TV. Lose half of your hongbao money in blackjack. Go to the next house for visiting. Repeat.

The Chinese New Year drill is well known, and some go through the motions each year in the name of tradition. But others are fighting against it – with a passport.

Ms Wynne Yang, 28, is one of a growing number of Singaporeans who celebrate the occasion by going abroad. She will spend the first week of the Year of the Pig in Thailand with family members.

“(House-visiting) is a tradition that the older generation used to follow. But the younger generation doesn't really mingle. When families come together, it usually is a once-a-year affair, but bonding can be achieved on occasions other than Chinese New Year,” said Ms Yang, who is on sabbatical.

“Cooking is also a hassle, and it's expensive to cater a buffet spread during this period. All the venues like function rooms in the condominium are always fully booked.”

Ms Yang is not alone in wanting

to celebrate in a different way.

Researcher Ms Zhang, 37, is going on a two-day trip to Batam for some quiet time with her 67-year-old mother on the first day of Chinese New Year. Ms Zhang, who is single, said: “Some aunties used to ask me uncomfortable questions, like ‘got boyfriend?’ and ‘are your expectations too high?’ but after a while, they stopped.”

“If I'm in Singapore, I'd feel obliged to go and *bai nian* (visit homes to wish one another well) and face the aunties. I feel like they think my intention is to get hongbao from them. But I don't really need your \$20 hongbao,” added Ms Zhang, who wanted to be identified only by her surname.

Others are getting out of the country because it is too quiet here for their liking. Ms Yan Ting Ting, 27, is looking forward to eating and shopping in Bangkok with seven friends who come from China's Fujian province like herself.

“Every year, there's nothing to do after the first and second day (of Chinese New Year),” said the permanent resident, who has been in Singapore for 11 years. She and her Singaporean husband have a four-year-old son.

The festive atmosphere in China is more “lively and fun”, she added.

Data from payment processing firm Worldpay showed a 29 per cent spike from 2016 to last year in the volume of flights booked in Sin-



Dr Ng May Mei with her husband Lim Chong Teck and daughter at Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca. The family had an early reunion dinner and are in Morocco for a trip that overlaps with Chinese New Year. PHOTO COURTESY OF NG MAY MEI

gapore during the three weeks leading to Chinese New Year.

Tour agency Chan Brothers also said it has seen a 5 per cent increase in bookings for Chinese New Year travel this year over that last year.

Dynasty Travel noted a 35 per cent jump in the number of travellers who have booked trips between the eve and the eighth day of Chinese New Year this year compared with the corresponding period last year. Dynasty's director of public relations Alicia Seah said one reason is that overseas travel has become the new tradition for

some family reunions.

Dr Ng May Mei, 61, is on an 11-day trip to Morocco with her husband, also 61, and their 32-year-old daughter, who was able to take time off from work. All three are doctors.

The family had an early reunion dinner on Jan 27 and flew off four days later. Dr Ng said: “In the past, I would take my whole family on the eve to walk down the crowded streets of Chinatown. But we stopped doing that now that the children have all grown up.”

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Warm, dry weather set to continue

People planning Chinese New Year house visits this week may want to leave their umbrellas at home and apply some sunscreen.

The Meteorological Service Singapore (MSS) has forecast that the first two weeks of the month will see a continuation of the dry weather from the previous two weeks.

“Warm conditions can be expected during the daytime on some days due to light winds, few clouds and solar heating of land areas,” the MSS said, adding that February is the driest month of the year.

Daily temperatures are forecast to range between 24 deg C and 33 deg C on most days. On days with little to no rainfall, the daily maximum temperature could climb to a high of around 34 deg C.

Prevailing north-east monsoon conditions are expected to persist, the MSS said, with winds blowing predominantly from the north or north-east.

Compared with the occasional breezy conditions experienced last month, winds for the fortnight that started on Feb 1 are expected to be weaker.

While last month saw mean wind speeds between 15kmh and 30kmh, speeds in the first two weeks of this month will go up to only 20kmh.

During this period, localised short thundery showers can be expected in the afternoon on four to six days. Rainfall for the first half of the month is expected to be normal.

For more information on the weather, go to www.weather.gov.sg

Tee Zhuo

Over 1,000 GP clinics to stay open for festive season

Feeling slightly queasy after your fifth or so reunion dinner?

Fret not, as more than one thousand general practitioner (GP) clinics will be open during the Chinese New Year holiday season.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) said in a statement on Friday that 1,014 GP clinics will be open at various times from tomorrow to Wednesday.

“We encourage members of the public who feel unwell during the festivities to visit their GP or a 24-hour clinic for conditions that are neither life-threatening nor serious,” said MOH.

It also reminded members of the public to visit accident and emergency departments at hospitals only for serious emergencies. These include chest pain, breathlessness and uncontrollable bleeding.

“Eat in moderation and continue exercising regularly to stay healthy over the holiday period,” the ministry advised.

The full list of clinics and their operating hours is available on MOH's website and on the HealthHub mobile application, among other sites.

Tee Zhuo

VISIT GP FOR NON-EMERGENCIES

We encourage members of the public who feel unwell during the festivities to visit their GP or a 24-hour clinic for conditions that are neither life-threatening nor serious.



MINISTRY OF HEALTH



Residents of Thong Teck Home for Senior Citizens, with Jiaksimi volunteers and nursing home staff, on their outing to Chinatown on Jan 26. Started in 2016 and held every couple of months, Jiaksimi gathers volunteers, some as young as 17, to accompany residents of the home to various parts of Singapore. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

Volunteer group takes seniors on trip to Chinatown

Rahimah Rashith

For almost 60 years, Madam Choo Kim Lian had not visited Chinatown. The 86-year-old's long working hours as a former clerk in Marsiling, where she also lived, gave her little time to venture out of the neighbourhood.

On Saturday a week ago, her distant memories of Chinatown were jolted awake as she explored its bustling streets filled with crowds of people shopping ahead of Chinese New Year. The outing was part of a ground-up initiative called Jiaksimi, or “what to eat” in Hokkien.

A highlight for Madam Choo was eating a plate of chicken rice at Hong Lim Food Centre, next to Chinatown Point.

“I have not eaten at a hawker centre in a long time,” she said in Mandarin. “Chicken rice is one of my favourite dishes. It brings back a lot

Sharing festive joy with seniors



of memories of the meal I used to eat in the old days.”

Started in 2016 and held every couple of months, Jiaksimi gathers volunteers, some as young as 17, to accompany residents of Thong Teck Home for Senior Citizens – many of whom are wheelchair users – to vari-

ous parts of Singapore, such as Sentosa and Newton Food Centre.

Food production specialist Owen Tan, 28, conceived the idea while previously working for a company that created meals for seniors. “I visited a lot of nursing homes in Singapore. There were many older adults

who enjoyed outside food,” he said.

“Most of them, I noticed, like to walk too, even when they are frail,” he added. “So I thought, why not take these seniors out to hawker centres. Most older people want some dignity to be able to choose their food once in a while.”

He roped in three friends to kick-start the project. All four – including Mr Aaron Sng, 29, a senior financial adviser, Ms Charmaine Kwok, 28, a speech therapist, and Ms Michelle Chan, 29, a sourcing specialist – are still a core part of the team.

Mr Sng said Jiaksimi is an opportunity for inter-generational bonding, adding: “It is a project that connects the bridges between the young and the old. While we bring joy to the old folks, we also constantly remind ourselves to love and care for those around us.”

The group's last outing began with a three-hour tour at Buddha Tooth Relic Temple. Many of the 20

RELIVING THE OLD DAYS

I have not eaten at a hawker centre in a long time. Chicken rice is one of my favourite dishes. It brings back a lot of memories of the meal I used to eat in the old days.



MADAM CHOO KIM LIAN, 86, on her first visit to Chinatown in almost 60 years.

seniors had not been to Chinatown in more than a decade.

“Each volunteer is paired with one or two seniors. Nursing home staff are also around. After a short briefing, we head off,” said Mr Tan, who has spent the last 14 years volunteering with seniors.

The entourage first explored Chinatown Complex, which will close for renovations from next month.

“I wanted to give the residents a glimpse of it before it changes,” said Mr Tan.

They explored shops that sold clothes, trinkets and ornaments. The group then visited the festive bazaars before settling down for lunch at the hawker centre, enjoying a spread of dishes including chicken rice, hor fun and vegetables. They later took a stroll along Clarke Quay.

Apart from an initial funding of \$3,000 from Youth Corps Singapore, Mr Tan and his friends pay for expenses like transportation – they usually hire a bus to shuttle the seniors from the home in Geylang – and lunch for the nursing home's staff.

To drive home the message that it does not take much to give, Mr Tan encourages volunteers to pay for the seniors' meals if they can afford to.

“You can still give from what little that you have. For about \$2 to \$4, you can still treat the elderly and see them with a wide smile on their faces,” he said.

Mr Rashid Saini, 51, a community engagement project officer at Thong Teck Home, said the initiative “lets our residents enjoy and marvel at the changing landscape of Singapore. Our seniors also get to meet and bond with volunteers and the nursing staff who care for them”.

Secondary 5 student Stephanie Kwok, 17, from Peirce Secondary School, first joined the project two years ago and found the experience meaningful. “Volunteering actually takes up only a few hours of our time, but these few hours may mean a lot to the elderly,” she said.

To find out more, readers can visit the Jiaksimi Facebook page www.facebook.com/aijiaximi

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Customers at the Jindingxuan restaurant in eastern Beijing (above) past 2am on a weekday. The 24-hour dimsum restaurant (below) does a brisk business because Beijing has few restaurants that open till the wee hours, and fewer still that never close. ST PHOTOS: DANSON CHEONG

BID TO SPICE UP BEIJING



Govt sees market for late-night spending, but experts, firms say it will be uphill battle

Danson Cheong
China Correspondent
In Beijing

It is 2am and a Chinese New Year jingle is blaring from the speakers at the Jindingxuan restaurant in Beijing. In the kitchen, cooks are hard at work preparing baskets of steaming dimsum.

Most restaurants in the Chinese capital have long shut for the night but at this five-storey dimsum joint in the east of the city, customers are streaming in.

"Each night we have about 2,000 customers, who come here after work, or after they visit clubs nearby," said the restaurant's manager, Mr Chen Yanzhao.

It does a brisk business because Beijing has few restaurants that open till the wee hours, and fewer still that never close.

"We were the first restaurant to go 24 hours. There are not many like us," said Mr Chen, 27.

The city authorities are hoping to change this, with the mayor announcing last month that the authorities would soon release a plan to boost Beijing's night-time economy – referring to business activities between 6pm and 6am.

The government has not released any specifics besides saying it will build "food streets" in several districts and encourage malls, supermarkets, convenience stores and restaurants to extend opening hours.

Like elsewhere in China, economic growth is flagging – Beijing's GDP rose by 6.6 per cent last year and is projected to grow 6 to 6.5 per cent this year – and the city wants to develop its night-time economy to boost domestic consumption and jump-start growth.

But while Beijing sees a big market for late-night spending, experts and businesses say the capital faces an uphill battle in its drive to become a city that doesn't sleep.

For one thing, residents have few options and have formed a culture of not staying out late, said Mr Chen, noting: "When people go out at night here, most of the time, they go to a KTV (lounge), get a bite and then go home."

Alibaba's Ant Financial analysed online payment data and found that Beijingers spent the shortest amount of time on dinner or late-night snacks compared with people in seven other cities, including Shanghai, the Global Times reported last month.

The city of 22 million also lacks the creative energy that defines other cities with developed night economies, like Tokyo and New York, said sociologist Matthew Chew from the Hong Kong Baptist University. "This creative atmosphere is the nightlife industry's lifeblood. I don't think the Chinese government is trying to develop this – quite the contrary," he said.

The Chinese authorities have long viewed night-time businesses with suspicion, seeing them as a source of crime, said Professor James Farrer, from Sophia University in Tokyo, who has studied China's nightlife.

"From the government's perspective, nightlife is associated with vice, especially prostitution, but also gambling, drug use, drinking, premarital and extramarital sex and other illicit activities," he said.

In recent years, Beijing, in its drive to modernise, has moved to clean up the city, closing down street stalls and bars in the traditional hutong alleyways.

The party-going Sanlitun area

used to be home to eateries, bars and restaurants but many of these were shut two years ago as part of the same clean-up drive.

Instead, the Chinese approach seems to be "primarily focused on developing shopping malls and getting consumers to spend money there and simply go home early", said Prof Farrer.

Mr Guo Sijian, who manages a bar in central Beijing, said spending in malls prices out those with lower incomes, who used to patronise the night-time food streets in Sanlitun and elsewhere.

"These were places where people of all social levels could get together, and they should be encouraging these," said Mr Guo, 46.

Other potential hurdles include transportation after dark and labour demands. Some of Beijing's subway lines do not operate past 10pm. This is a problem, with Beijing's urban sprawl making it a challenge to get around, said Prof Chew.

Public transport is a key part of the night-time economy in other cities, helping people access services, and nocturnal workers to get to their jobs.

Labour demands will also rise if businesses need to operate around the clock, said Tsinghua University economist Yuan Gangming, noting that Beijing's service sector is staffed by migrants from other provinces. In the last two years, Beijing has evicted migrant workers as part of efforts to control its population.

"More migrants will create concerns with housing, transport and security," he said. "Beijing has been restricting its population in recent years, but if it wants to boost consumption, it needs to change its position and be more open."

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‘Underground’ Catholic clergyman appointed as state-backed bishop

BEIJING • A bishop from China's "underground" Catholic Church is slated to step up as the official state-backed clergyman for a diocese in central China, state-run media reported, amid a thaw in relations between Beijing and the Vatican.

China's estimated 10 million Catholics are legally supposed to attend only churches governed by a state-controlled body with clergy appointed by the Communist Party. But many worship in so-called unregistered "underground churches" led by bishops loyal to the Vatican.

An agreement struck in September on the appointment of bishops has paved the way for a rapproche-

ment between Beijing and the Vatican after diplomatic ties were cut off in 1951. It also gives both sides a say in appointing Catholic bishops in China.

Bishop Jin Lugang was inaugurated as coadjutor bishop for the Nanyang diocese, the Global Times reported last Friday, and will assist 98-year-old diocesan Bishop Zhu Baoyu until his retirement.

"I think it is a good thing," said Mr Anthony Lam, a Chinese Catholic Church expert at Hong Kong's Holy Spirit Study Centre, noting that there are about 40 vacancies to be filled in dioceses across China.

Though the Holy See has appointed at least 20 clergymen to fill

these spots, the Chinese government has not yet approved them, he told AFP.

"They are too nervous," he said, referring to the local governments which are now tasked with vetting the appointees.

"To some extent, it's their recommendation to the central government that these people are reliable, you can trust them, they will not do anything harmful to the government." That is why some government officials are adopting a cautious attitude and holding some cases for long periods of time, he explained.

China's Catholic community urgently needs bishops that are "politi-

cally reliable", with nearly half of dioceses without bishops, said the Global Times in its report.

Bishop Jin's official ordination follows a clampdown on religious worship in China, where churches were destroyed in some regions and several church-run kindergartens closed last year.

The authorities have also cracked down on Bible sales.

Last month, dozens of members of a prominent unofficial Protestant church went missing in south-west China after the authorities raided their homes, churchgoers said.

Police have detained the church pastor, who faces allegations of "inciting state subversion", according to the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province.

The local authorities have also apprehended other church members on suspicion of "picking quarrels", as well as "illegal operations" for selling Bibles and religious books, the church said. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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Images obtained by TV channel Bandeirantes show the moment a muddy sludge engulfed the company canteen and neighbouring buildings in Brumadinho, in Minas Gerais state, on Jan 25. PHOTO: TV BANDEIRANTES

Dramatic video captures the moment Brazil dam collapses

Close-ups show cars, people scrambling to escape torrent of mud; latest tally confirms 115 dead and 248 missing

BELO HORIZONTE (Brazil) • Major Brazilian TV outlets have obtained dramatic security camera video showing the outer wall of a Brazilian dam collapsing and an avalanche of mud crushing trees, houses and cars in its path.

Close-ups replayed throughout the day showed cars and people scrambling unsuccessfully to escape the dark red torrent.

The images emerged as it was revealed that the deadly collapse of the dam controlled by miner Vale a week ago likely happened because parts of the sand and dried-mud structure dissolved into liquid, a state regulator said in an interview, similar to what caused another deadly mining disaster less than four years ago.

With 115 people confirmed dead and another 248 missing, according to information from the rescue team last Friday evening, the tailings dam collapse in the town of

Brumadinho could be Brazil's deadliest mine disaster.

The burst dam at the Corrego do Feijao mine on Jan 25 has ignited intense public anger against Vale, which was co-owner of Samarco, the previous dam that collapsed.

Around 2,000 people gathered in Belo Horizonte, capital of the mining-intensive state of Minas Gerais which is home to both disasters, to protest against Vale, with some saying its top executives should be jailed.

"I lost three of my students," said Ms Aparecida Moreira, a teacher at a local law school. "They are dead, and we don't know where their bodies are."

There were also demands for a congressional investigation.

An internal study showed that the miner knew as recently as last year that some of the areas swamped with toxic mud were at risk if the dam burst, according to



Folha de S.Paulo newspaper.

Vale described the document as a routine disaster preparation plan required by regulators.

The disaster poses a headache for the new government of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, whose business-friendly administration must juggle public anger over the tragedy and its own desire to ease mining and environmental regulations to kick-start growth.

Mr Hildebrando Neto, Minas Gerais' deputy minister for environmental regulations, told Reuters late last Thursday that all evidence suggests that the burst was caused by liquefaction, whereby a solid material such as sand loses strength and stiffness and behaves more like

a liquid. Dams holding mining waste, known as tailings, sometimes collapse for this reason.

Mr Neto said liquefaction caused the 2015 collapse of the Samarco dam, which led to the deaths of 19 people. The internal study reported by the Folha newspaper was dated April 18 last year, and outlined the likely impact of a collapse at the dam.

It found that the mine restaurant, where many Vale workers were likely to have died, would be hit by toxic mud. The study envisaged that sirens would alert workers if the dam burst. The company has said the mud flow destroyed the sirens before they could sound the alarm.

Vale said in a statement that the plan was "built on the basis of technical studies of hypothetical scenarios in the event of a breach", although it did not directly reference Folha's story.

Officials with the Mines and Energy Ministry and the National Mining Agency told reporters last Friday that the cause of the rupture was still unclear.

"If we had known (what the problem was), maybe this tragedy would have never happened," the ministry's mining secretary, Mr Alexandre Vidigal, said. "We are in the investigation phase and we cannot say whether the (inspection) model was adequate or not."

REUTERS

Residents of Brumadinho, Brazil, marching on Friday in memory of the victims of the collapsed dam owned by Brazilian mining company Vale. Some people say its top executives should be jailed. PHOTO: REUTERS

Malaysian minister laughs off speculation about wedding

PETALING JAYA • Speculation is swirling about Malaysian minister Yeo Bee Yin after the Sin Chew Daily reported that she will be marrying Mr Lee Yeow Seng, a scion of a prominent property development family.

The wedding will reportedly be held in Kuala Lumpur and is believed to be set for March 29.

The Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Minister did not deny the rumours when asked by reporters yesterday during a walkabout in Muar, Johor, to distribute mandarin oranges and Chinese New Year greeting cards.

"I don't know about this," she said, laughing. "No comments on

personal major life events."

Mr Lee, 40, is chief executive of IOI Properties Group and the youngest son of business tycoon Lee Shin Cheng.

Talk of the upcoming marriage spread after Malaysian singers Fish Leong and Michael Wong were said to have been invited to perform at the wedding.

The couple's romance came to light in December last year after a friend of Ms Yeo uploaded a picture of himself posing with Ms Yeo and Mr Lee.

The friend wrote: "Warning: This photo will make many guys cry. Yeo Bee Yin just introduced her special boyfriend to me."

In another photo, Ms Yeo, 36, and



The wedding of IOI Properties Group chief executive Lee Yeow Seng and Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Minister Yeo Bee Yin (right) is rumoured to be set for next month. PHOTOS: IOI PROPERTIES, FILE PHOTO



her friend are standing with a group of people making the "heart" sign with their hands.

IOI Properties' corporate communications team, Mr Lee and Ms Yeo had not replied to The Star's

queries last Friday.

Ms Yeo's family reportedly will not be holding a wedding reception in their hometown of Segamat, Johor. THE STAR, SIN CHEW DAILY/ASIA NEWSNETWORK

IMDB scandal could hit top executives' pay: Goldman

WASHINGTON • The Goldman Sachs board has said it is withholding a bonus worth at least US\$7 million (\$9.5 million) from former chief executive Lloyd Blankfein until investigations into the bank's involvement in the Malaysia Development Berhad (IMDB) scandal are resolved.

The bank also introduced a new forfeiture provision in its annual compensation plans for both its most senior executives, current chief executive David Solomon and his predecessor, Mr Blankfein, relating to the ongoing IMDB proceedings.

The move, announced last Friday, underscored the perils the IMDB scandal still hold for Goldman, which is being investigated by Malaysian authorities and the United States Department of Justice for its role as underwriter and arranger of three bond sales that

raised US\$6.5 billion for IMDB.

The Justice Department estimated that a total of US\$4.5 billion was misappropriated by high-level IMDB fund officials and their associates between 2009 and 2014, including some of the funds that Goldman helped raise.

The Wall Street bank has consistently denied any wrongdoing.

Goldman said in a regulatory filing on Friday that its board can reduce pay packages of top executives depending on the outcome of ongoing investigations into the fraud at IMDB.

The bank said it paid Mr Solomon US\$23 million in total compensation last year, a 9.5 per cent jump from the previous year.

Mr Blankfein received US\$20.5 million in annual compensation last year, down US\$3.5 million from 2017. REUTERS

PM Mahathir unfazed by Najib's social media popularity

PUTRAJAYA • Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad is unperturbed by the sudden popularity of his predecessor, Najib Razak, on social media.

Tun Dr Mahathir, who is Pakatan Harapan chairman, said Najib was not a threat to the coalition and the

government had allowed him to continue to give speeches.

Najib currently faces dozens of criminal charges linked to scandal-ridden state fund 1MDB, including allegations of money laundering, criminal breach of trust and abuse of power. He has denied any wrongdoing.

The Pekan MP stepped down as prime minister and president of former ruling party Umno after his Barisan Nasional alliance was defeated in last May's general election, but continues to be a visible presence as a member of the opposition.

"He seems... (to be) gaining popu-

larity on social media because he provides a lot of stories," Dr Mahathir told reporters at the Perdana Leadership Foundation last Friday.

He also dismissed Najib's attacks on the government, especially on the continued decline of the Malaysian ringgit.

"The ringgit did not fall, the real problem is the USD (US dollar) has strengthened. We are trying to further strengthen it (the ringgit) and this should not be used as an accurate measure to determine the country's economic performance.

"Why didn't he do all the things

he asked us (the government) to do when he was in power?" he said.

"If he had done all those things he told us to do, he would still (be) the prime minister."

In a Facebook post, Najib has expressed concern over the continued decline in the ringgit despite oil prices strengthening.

Najib said this bucked previous trends when the ringgit would move in tandem with global oil prices. THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK





Russian military servicemen at the Iskander M Missile complex near Moscow on Jan 23 during a briefing on 9M729 cruise missile. Moscow insists that the disputed missile is allowed under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces pact with Washington. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Russia suspends N-treaty with US in tit-for-tat move

Moscow will not initiate disarmament talks till Washington has ‘matured enough’, says Putin

MOSCOW • Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said Russia was suspending its participation in a key Cold War-era missile treaty in a mirror response to a US move

the day before. Moscow and Washington have long accused each other of violating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement.

United States President Donald Trump last year announced plans to withdraw unless Russia fulfilled its obligations. “Our American partners have announced they are suspending their participation in the deal, and we are also suspending our participation,” Mr Putin said of the agreement. He said during a televised meet-

ing with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu that Russia would no longer initiate talks with the US on disarmament. “We will wait until our partners have matured enough to conduct an equal, meaningful dialogue with us on this important topic,” he said. Brokered by former US president

Ronald Reagan with last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, the treaty ended a superpower build-up of warheads. It banned ground-launched missiles with a range of 500km to 5,500km. The deal resolved a crisis over Soviet nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles targeting Western capitals, but put no restrictions on other major military actors such as China. Mr Trump said last Friday that Washington was starting a process to withdraw from the agreement in six months. He said he would like to “get everybody in a big and beautiful room and do a new treaty”, but in the meantime, the United States “can’t be put at a disadvantage”. The US in December gave Moscow a 60-day deadline to dismantle missiles it said breached the agreement. But Moscow has insisted that the disputed 9M729 missile is al-

lowed under the treaty. Mr Lavrov yesterday repeated Russian accusations that Washington itself has been in violation of the deal for many years. Mr Putin, meanwhile, said Russia would seek to develop medium-range missiles in response to what he said were similar projects in the US. Mr Lavrov at yesterday’s meeting also voiced concerns that Washington’s decision to withdraw from the INF could jeopardise the extension of the New Start treaty. That agreement, which caps the number of nuclear warheads held by the US and Russia, expires in 2021. China’s Foreign Ministry said yesterday the US should resolve its differences with Russia through dialogue instead of withdrawing from an important nuclear arms control agreement. AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

Venezuelan general rejects Maduro ahead of duelling rallies in Caracas

CARACAS • A high-ranking Venezuelan air force general has disavowed President Nicolas Maduro and now recognises opposition leader Juan Guaido as interim head of state, according to a video circulating on Twitter yesterday. In the video, General Francisco Yanez, a member of the air force’s high command, called on other members of the military to defect, saying that he was rejecting Mr

Maduro’s “irritating and dictatorial authority”. “People of Venezuela, 90 per cent of the armed forces of Venezuela are not with the dictator, they are with the people of Venezuela,” Gen Yanez said in the video. “Given the happenings of the last few hours, already the transition to democracy is imminent.” The high command’s webpage

lists him, along with a photo, as the air force’s head of strategic planning. On its Twitter account, the high command accused the general of treason. Gen Yanez is the first active Venezuelan general to recognise Mr Guaido since he proclaimed himself president on Jan 23. Mr Guaido has acknowledged “clandestine meetings” with members of the armed forces and security forces,

who he is trying to woo with an amnesty offer. Tens of thousands of protesters were set to pour onto the streets of Caracas yesterday to back Mr Guaido’s calls for early elections as international pressure increased on Mr Maduro to step down. Major European countries have set a deadline of today for Mr Maduro to call snap presidential elections. Failing that, they will join the United States in recognising National Assembly speaker Guaido as Venezuela’s interim president. “Maduro’s tyranny must end and must end now,” US Vice-President Mike Pence told a rally of exiled Venezuelans in Miami on the eve of the protest. Mr Guaido’s call for a massive

show of popular support coincides with a huge pro-Maduro demonstration. The ruling Socialist party was due to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the rise to power of Hugo Chavez, Mr Maduro’s late predecessor, yesterday. The “clear goal” of the march was “to accompany the ultimatum given by members of the European Union”, Mr Guaido said ahead of the rally, which will begin outside the EU offices in eastern Caracas. “We are going to stage the biggest march in the history of Venezuela and our continent,” he added. Mr Guaido moved to expand his international support base by assuring Venezuelans in Miami on the eve of the protest. Mr Guaido’s call for a massive

ousting Mr Maduro. The rival marches will take place in different districts of a tense Venezuelan capital. Mr Maduro’s supporters will concentrate in Plaza Bolivar in the heart of Caracas, 10km from the EU offices. In a letter to the presidents of Mexico and Uruguay published last Friday, Mr Guaido ruled out any negotiations with Mr Maduro unless he starts “the transition process, culminating in the holding of free elections”. Mexico’s Mr Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and Uruguay’s Mr Tabare Vazquez have jointly called a conference in Montevideo this Thursday for “neutral” countries to discuss the crisis. REUTERS, AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

Virginia governor won’t quit over racist photo

NEW YORK • The Governor of Virginia has acknowledged that he was photographed more than 30 years ago in a costume that was “clearly racist and offensive”. He admitted that he had dressed either as a member of the Ku Klux Klan or in blackface, but he has resisted a flood of calls for his resignation from national and state Democrats. “I am deeply sorry for the decision I made to appear as I did in this photo and for the hurt that decision caused then and now,” Governor Ralph Northam, a Democrat, said in a statement last Friday evening. In a subsequent video, Dr Northam said he was “ready to do the hard work of regaining your trust” and was committed to staying in office “through the remainder of my term”. He issued his statement hours after the photograph – which was included on his 1984 yearbook page from Eastern Virginia Medical School and appeared alongside other pictures of himself – became public. Neither person in the black-and-white photograph was identified, and Dr Northam, a paediatric neurologist, did not confirm which costume he had worn. He faced intense pressure last Friday night to step down, as

Democrats moved swiftly to send a zero-tolerance message to a governor whose 2017 election marked the party’s most significant victory since losing the White House. The first calls came from Democratic presidential candidates, some of whom had travelled to Virginia to campaign with Dr Northam just over a year ago. By the end of the night, four senators – Ms Kamala Harris of California, Ms Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Ms Kirsten Gillibrand of New York and Mr Cory Booker of New Jersey – and Mr Julian Castro, the former mayor of San Antonio, had all urged Governor Northam to resign. In Virginia, Mayor Levar Stoney of Richmond and three Democratic members of the state’s congressional delegation, Representatives Donald McEachin, Abigail Spanberger and Elaine Luria all urged Dr Northam to step down. The Virginia Legislative Black Caucus initially stopped just short of demanding his resignation, but after meeting with the governor, it said, “It is time for him to resign, so that Virginia can begin the process of healing.” If Dr Northam were to resign, Lieutenant-Governor Justin Fairfax would assume the governor’s office. NYTIMES



Democrat Governor Ralph Northam did not confirm which costume he wore in the photo on his 1984 yearbook page (above). PHOTOS: OBTAINED BY THE WASHINGTON POST, AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

WorldBriefs

Cruise missile test a success, says Iran

TEHERAN • Iran announced the successful test of a new cruise missile with a range of more than 1,350km yesterday, state television reported. “The test of the Hoveizeh cruise missile was carried out successfully at a range of 1,200km and accurately hit the set target,” Defence Minister Amir Hatami said. “It can be ready in the shortest possible time and flies at a very low altitude,” he said in an announcement that coincided with 40th anniversary celebrations of the Islamic Republic. AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

China officials dealt with over vaccine scandal

BEIJING • China’s corruption watchdog yesterday said it has disciplined more than 80 officials linked to a major vaccine scandal last summer that inflamed public fears over the safety of domestically produced drugs. Changchun Changsheng

Biotechnology – a major Chinese manufacturer of rabies vaccines – was slapped with a US\$1.3 billion (\$\$1.8 billion) fine last October after it was found to have fabricated records. Four officials from the China Food and Drug Administration, including a deputy director, have also been handed over to prosecutors. The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection said it would “seriously deal with” more than 80 other provincial or local officials. These officials have already been fired or demoted. AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

Passenger smuggled leopard cub on flight

NEW DELHI • A passenger who smuggled a month-old leopard cub in hand luggage on a flight from Bangkok to Chennai has been arrested, the Indian authorities said yesterday. The cub, weighing just over 1kg, was found in a plastic grocery basket hidden inside a bag after the passenger arrived in India on the Thai Airways flight. AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

KL plans labour law reform amid mistreatment of foreign workers

Govt working with labour groups to give workers more legal protection

Jeffrey Hutton
Regional Correspondent

In mid-2016, 33-year-old Ekwanto set out from his village of Gunem in Central Java and headed to Malaysia, where he hoped to earn enough working on a construction project to open a small grocery store when he returned home.

But it was not to be. The job ended after three months when the project owner suddenly returned to his village in southern Sumatra. Instead of heading home too, Mr Ekwanto stayed on because he did not have a proper work permit.

He had bypassed recruiters that arrange such things, sometimes for fees equivalent to more than three months' pay.

Despite eventually finding work in Malaysia, intensifying police raids made his life unbearable.

After 18 months, Mr Ekwanto paid the Indonesian embassy Rm1,800 (\$595) to send him home. His savings? Ten million rupiah (\$970) – the equivalent of a month's pay for a university-educated office worker in Jakarta. "It was very hard there," said Mr Ekwanto, who now works at a bank in his village. "I failed to achieve my dream."

Malaysia's expanding palm oil, construction and manufacturing sectors are magnets for the region's legions of unskilled workers from Indonesia, Bangladesh and elsewhere, drawn by higher wages and pushed by few opportunities at home. But unscrupulous recruiters, police and an unforgiving legal system that affords both domestic and foreign workers few rights make the journey risky for many.

That may be about to change.



Immigration Department personnel during a raid at a construction site in Kuala Lumpur on Sept 26 to crack down on undocumented foreign workers. Malaysia needs a steady supply of unskilled workers and must repair the damage to the country's reputation as a dangerous place for foreign workers. PHOTO: BERNAMA

Malaysia's Human Resources Minister M. Kulasegaran said the Pakatan Harapan government of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad would propose changes to the country's patchwork of decades-old labour laws to offer both domestic and foreign workers more legal protection.

"We need to ensure the dignity and protection not only of domestic workers but also foreign ones," Mr Kulasegaran told The Sunday Times.

At issue are as many as nine industrial relations laws dating as far

back as the 1950s that give the government broad powers to prevent or disband unions and limit collective bargaining.

The government is consulting labour groups, including the Malaysian Trade Union Congress and International Labour Organisation (ILO), Mr Kulasegaran said.

The government has said it is considering extending worker's compensation to foreign workers and ban the use of private recruiting agencies over fears that some are engaging in what amounts to hu-

DIGNITY

We need to ensure the dignity and protection not only of domestic workers but also foreign ones.



MALAYSIAN HUMAN RESOURCES MINISTER M. KULASEGARAN

man trafficking.

Mr Kulasegaran said Malaysia needs a steady supply of unskilled workers and must repair the damage to the country's reputation as a dangerous place for foreign workers following media reports alleging abuse.

Malaysia's unemployment rate at the end of September was 3.4 per cent. Recent agricultural sector surveys, including among oil palm plantations, suggest that foreign workers make up more than 80 per cent of labour on hand.

"Foreign workers are an indispensable part of the economy," Mr Kulasegaran said.

An amnesty for undocumented workers is "in the pipeline", the minister said, adding that the final decision belongs to Home Affairs Minister Muhyiddin Yassin.

Last August, the government wrapped up a partial amnesty, charging fees and fines of up to RM400 to undocumented workers who turned themselves in for deportation.

Just how many foreign workers are in Malaysia is unclear. The most recent government data shows that it is host to just shy of 1.8 million documented foreign workers.

A report published last April by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute reckons that there can be a similar number of undocumented workers.

That brings the number of foreign workers to nearly four million. That compares with the seven million Malaysians in the workforce.

Ample stores of cheap, vulnerable and pliant undocumented workers are fertile ground for abuse and corruption, activists warn.

Top Glove, the world's biggest rubber glove maker, said it was monitoring workers' hours after media reports alleged that staff at two of its factories were working much longer hours than permitted by law to repay recruiting agencies.

"The types of conditions alleged in the Top Glove case are not an anomaly. There are many more cases like the one described," said Mr David Welsh, Malaysia and Indonesia country director for labour advocacy group Solidarity Centre.

Still, the government deserves credit for tackling the issue and consulting widely, Mr Welsh said. "They are giving stakeholders a chance for feedback. The process is encouraging and badly needed. Of course, the proof is in the pudding."

The ILO confirmed that Malaysia has asked for its help "as part of a holistic review of a revision of its main labour acts", said its Kuala Lumpur-based chief technical advisor, Mr Hugo van Noord.

He is heading the international body's review of Malaysia's labour laws and is aiming to secure labour rights like freedom of association, union organisation and collective bargaining.

"Successful passage of all these and other legal and institutional reforms... would lead to a new industrial relations landscape in Malaysia with less government intervention," Mr Van Noord said.

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Meteorite said to have hit Cuba



A meteorite may have hit western Cuba on Friday, the United States National Weather Service said. "Radar may have detected the meteor that affected western Cuba earlier today. At 1.21pm, a signature was detected near Vinales, Cuba, at a height of over 7,900m above ground level," the service's branch in Key West, Florida, tweeted. There were no injuries from the reported incident, CNN's Havana bureau chief Patrick Oppmann wrote on Twitter. "Residents of Vinales, Cuba, heard a large explosion this afternoon and say a small meteorite may have hit the town," Mr Oppmann said. A video uploaded to YouTube shows a vapour trail from the purported meteorite. The photos released by Tele Pinar show blackened fragments of what are said to be pieces of the meteorite. Vinales is a popular destination for tourists located some 180km south-west of Havana. PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE



Weather

Singapore
24/32°C



Today

Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.

Outlook

Monday: Afternoon thundery showers.
Tuesday: Fair and warm.

Air quality
PSI
22-48 (Good)
24-hour reading as of 8pm yesterday

Sunrise
7.17am
Sunset
7.21pm

Moonrise
5.53am
Moonset
6.12pm

North
Thunderstorm
South
Thunderstorm
East
Thunderstorm
West
Thunderstorm
Central
Thunderstorm

Tides
Today: 4.31am (1.7m), 10.15am (2.8m), 4.54pm (0.6m).
Tomorrow: 12.01am (2.7m), 5.01am (1.6m), 10.50am (2.9m), 5.24pm (0.6m).

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LOOKING AT THE UPSIDE
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Mum found guilty of subjecting girl, 3, to genital mutilation

Ugandan faces up to 14 years' jail in landmark UK case in first conviction under 1985 law

LONDON • A London mother was found guilty on Friday of subjecting her three-year-old daughter to female genital mutilation (FGM), in Britain's first conviction for the offence – more than 30 years after the practice was outlawed. The Ugandan mother of two, who cannot be named for legal reasons, could face up to 14 years in jail. The police and anti-FGM campaigners said the conviction sent a strong message that FGM was child abuse and would be prosecuted. "It's going to send a shock wave around the community. It's a wake-up call. It will be a huge deterrent," activist Hibo Wardere told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. British Interior Minister Sajid Javid welcomed the "landmark conviction". He tweeted: "(FGM) is a sickening, depraved form of child abuse and we will do all we can to ensure all perpetrators are brought to justice."

Justice Philippa Whipple adjourned sentencing until March 8. The police launched an investigation after the girl's parents rushed her to hospital on Aug 28, 2017, following severe bleeding and doctors found three cuts to her genitalia. In the following months, the mother performed dozens of witchcraft spells – two involving cows' tongues with nails embedded in them – to try to silence investigators and the director of public prosecutions. The girl's Ghanaian father, who was also on trial, was acquitted of FGM and of failing to protect his daughter from the risk of FGM. During the trial, the 37-year-old mother told London's Central Criminal Court that her daughter had hurt herself falling from a kitchen worktop at their East London flat. But the girl told police she had been held down and cut by a "witch". Her older brother later wrote a letter to police saying his

137,000

Estimated number of women and girls in England and Wales who have undergone female genital mutilation, which affects diaspora communities from countries such as Somalia, Sierra Leone and Egypt.

'SICKENING AND DEPRAVED'
(Female genital mutilation) is a sickening, depraved form of child abuse and we will do all we can to ensure all perpetrators are brought to justice.

BRITISH INTERIOR MINISTER SAJID JAVID

mother had cut her. Four doctors, including two leading FGM experts, said the cuts had been made with a sharp implement such as a scalpel and could not be explained by a fall. The obstetrician who treated the girl told the jury her injuries were similar to cases of botched FGM he had seen in his native Sudan. The court heard that the mother turned to witchcraft to try to halt police investigations following her arrest. Aside from the cows' tongues, police found 40 limes in a freezer at her home containing the names of people involved in the case with messages such as "I freeze your mouth" and "I freeze you out of my life". The mother, a former care worker, said she did not come from an ethnic group that practised FGM and no motive was given in court. The police and prosecutors in Britain have faced mounting pressure to secure a conviction for FGM, which was outlawed in 1985. Two previous trials ended in acquittals. Ms Lynette Woodrow of the Crown Prosecution Service said FGM had an "appalling physical and emotional impact". Detective Inspector Allen Davis, the police lead on FGM, said the case showed that FGM was happening in Britain "behind a cloak of secrecy". "We really need information from people in communities who know FGM is happening – which young people are at risk of, and who is doing the cutting," he added. An estimated 137,000 women and girls in England and Wales have undergone FGM, which affects diaspora communities from many countries, including Somalia, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Sudan, Nigeria and Egypt. The internationally condemned practice typically involves the partial or total removal of the external genitalia. REUTERS

German Jews see red over plans for sausage museum on ex-Nazi site

BERLIN • Germany's Jewish community is angry at plans to build a museum celebrating a local sausage delicacy on the site of a former facility where the Nazis held Jews before sending them to the Buchenwald concentration camp in the eastern state of Thuringia. Friends of the Thuringian Sausage, an association that runs a museum in honour of the delicacy named after the region, wants to move to a new building to be located on land where the Nazis held prisoners in a so-called sub-camp in World War II. "We are shocked and irritated by the total lack of sensitivity," said Mr Reinhard Schramm, head of the 800-strong Jewish community in Thuringia. "We are in talks with city officials and hope we can find a solution that honours the victims." The site of the former sub-camp lies on the outskirts of the city of Muehlhausen, some 80km north-west of Buchenwald, on a patch of land that a private investor bought from the government in 2008. The investor now wants to build a theatre, a hotel and a building to house the new sausage museum – a project that has received the backing of the city. The Muehlhausen city council held a meeting last Thursday attended by representatives of the Jewish community to find a solution, Mr Schramm said. One idea being considered is to ensure that the new project includes some kind of memorial to the victims of the Nazis. A spokesman for the First German Sausage Museum, currently located in Holzhausen, 60km south of Muehlhausen, did not respond to an e-mail asking for comment. The museum announced last Wednesday its plans to move to Muehlhausen, saying the new site would give it more seating capacity and allow it to include new attractions. Thuringian sausages, usually made with pork mince, caraway, marjoram and garlic, are one of the most famous of the more than 1,500 sausage varieties made in Germany. REUTERS

The site of the former sub-camp lies on the outskirts of the city of Muehlhausen, some 80km north-west of Buchenwald, on a patch of land that a private investor bought from the government in 2008.

S. Korean children's song hits Billboard amid lawsuit

SEOUL • The South Korean children's educational song Baby Shark has made history as part of the Korean Wave, or "hallyu", by charting on Billboard's most competitive Hot 100 list as the first non-pop Korean song. For the week of Feb 2, Baby Shark came in 36th place on the Hot 100 chart, stepping up one notch from a week earlier. It was the fourth week in a row that the simple viral song remained on the main Billboard song chart after debuting at 32nd. It was a feat comparable to those by the most famous K-pop artists such as Psy and the Wonder Girls, or boy band BTS, whose latest song Idol ranked as high as 11th place. After its release in 2015 by Pinkfong, a children's education entertainment brand by education start-up SmartStudy, the rhythmic two-minute song went viral in Korea and abroad. It created a torrent of YouTube parodies among celebrities ranging



The catchy children's educational song Baby Shark has been charting on Billboard's Hot 100 since the second week of January as the first non-pop Korean song. The song-and-dance video, which features a shark family, has been viewed over 2.27 billion times on YouTube as of Friday. PHOTO: YOUTUBE/PINKFONG! KIDS' SONGS & STORIES

from popular K-pop girl band Red Velvet to American comedian Ellen DeGeneres, as well as ordinary YouTube viewers. The official English version of the song drew over 2.27 billion YouTube views as of Friday, and continues to gather more views every day. At home, however, the catchy song's creators have been embroiled in some legal battles. The main opposition Liberty Korea Party unilaterally used the song while it campaigned for the regional election last year. SmartStudy accused the party of copyright infringement and threat-

ened to take legal action, but the opposition party protested and accused SmartStudy of plagiarising American children's song composer Johnny Only's Baby Shark Song. The party added it had prior consent from Mr Only to use the song. Several months later, in October, the American composer filed a claim for damages with a South Korean court, demanding the chief of SmartStudy pay five million won (\$\$6,000) in compensation for copying his 2011 song. SmartStudy rejected the plagiarism claim, saying its song was a recreation of a traditional children's

song that has no valid copyrights. The first court hearing was scheduled for last Thursday, but Mr Only reportedly dropped the lawsuit. Now, the American is said to be planning to file another suit demanding a larger compensation. The famous Baby Shark song features the rhythmic introduction of a shark family and their underwater hunt for small fish. The video of the English-language version of the song comes with matching choreography and the additive refrain of "doo doo doo doo doo". THE KOREA HERALD/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

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听说了吗?

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真的吗?

吓一跳!

哎哟,这么复杂啊。

你一定赞

非赞不可

天哪,怎么有这样的事!

哇,好心有好报!

正能量

怎么会这样!

太可怜了!

人气

新闻

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Sport



Son to the fore
South Korean puts Asian Cup setback behind to score Spurs' winner against Newcastle.
A28

BigMatch

EMERY INSPIRED BY RIVALS

He is looking to the recent progress of Spurs, Liverpool as a model for Arsenal's own growth

LONDON • Unai Emery believes Pep Guardiola is the best coach but sees the Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur models as the way forward for Arsenal.

The manager is eight months into the Gunners job, and ahead of today's reverse with Guardiola's Manchester City, who beat him in his first game in English football, he spoke about drawing inspiration from the champions' title rivals.

He explained he cannot spend big like City, evidenced by his lone January signing of Denis Suarez on loan from Barcelona following a summer window that saw them go for less established players.

"I remember three years ago, Liverpool were playing in the Europa League final, they were in the top four in the Premier League, and their progress is very good progress and now they are the favourites," Emery was reported as saying.

"Maybe Manchester City is a different example, because they bought a very important lot, with paying a lot and maybe we can't do that now like that.

"But we can also do one way similar to Liverpool, similar to Tottenham – doing more with young players, using well players who can improve with us.

"We are doing that. We need time

but also we need to be very demanding of ourselves."

And there is no man who is more demanding than Guardiola, 48, whom he has never beaten.

Said Emery, 47: "I have analysed a lot of teams and coaches and I think it's difficult to find one coach who is better than Guardiola."

Guardiola returned the compliments about his fellow Spaniard.

He told Sky Sports: "I've never been with him in his clubs but my impression from outside is that he's a manager who is well prepared."

Guardiola is demanding a big improvement from his team because he knows just how crucial the next eight days will be in determining whether the title ends up in the trophy room at Anfield or the Etihad Stadium come May 12.

After hosting Arsenal, they travel

to Everton on Wednesday before playing Chelsea at home four days later. If City win all three games, the worst-case scenario is that they will be two points behind Liverpool, who have no midweek fixture.

The Reds play West Ham tomorrow, before playing Bournemouth at home five days later.

City's accuracy has dipped this term. Last season, they averaged 2.79 goals per game compared with 2.63 this term. Their shooting accuracy has also diminished, with 38 per cent of their shots hitting the target rather than 40 per cent.

So it is just as well that they are facing a team with a defensive injury crisis. Guardiola was annoyed by City's failure to break down Newcastle United's rigid and compact defence in their 2-1 loss last Tuesday but, otherwise, he was giving little away.

He said: "Many details we didn't do quite well. Of course we analyse, we talk about our game and see what we have to improve, like the way we have to attack some defensive structures like Newcastle, but it will be different against Arsenal."

Emery did let on more, saying: "Usually we want to have more possession than the opposition but, against City, maybe it is not possible because they impose usually the possession first and the positioning. But we are going to try to not let them have the possession very easy and also don't let them have the positioning better than us.

"But this detail is a big detail!"

THE TIMES, LONDON

MANCHESTER CITY V ARSENAL
Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, tomorrow, 12.30am

A MODEL FOR PROGRESS

"... We can also do one way similar to Liverpool, similar to Tottenham – doing more with young players, using well players who can improve with us.

UNA EMERY, Arsenal manager, on learning from league rivals to find a good model to develop his team to challenge Manchester City.



Arsenal manager Unai Emery explained that he needs time to work with players, and the club need to be very demanding of themselves to catch up with the likes of big-spenders Manchester City, whom they face at the Etihad Stadium today. PHOTO: REUTERS

HeartOfFootball

Another 'reality check' for City or Arsenal?



Rob Hughes

The eyes of Pep Guardiola narrowed. He simmered when reporters probed for reasons why Manchester City, virtually unbeatable this time last year, have slipped five points behind Liverpool in the Premier League.

"Five, six, seven points, it doesn't matter," he replied, almost as if he were talking in the dressing room rather than the press room.

"What matters is we improve our game," he said. "We are not happy about our last performance," (the defeat last Tuesday at Newcastle despite scoring in the first minute).

"The only way after a negative result is play and play and play," Guardiola insisted. "We were not happy with the performance, not at half-time, not at the end. The players know."

This evening against Arsenal will, he believes, be completely different. Guardiola has never lost in 11 games against a side coached by fellow Spaniard Unai Emery. But nevertheless he respects Emery as an ultra-competitive opponent.

"Arsenal," Guardiola said, "have very nice individual players in midfield and top, top players up front."

This weekend, Jurgen Klopp,

whose Liverpool side were held to a draw at home by Leicester on Wednesday, said that all the top six clubs are having a "reality check".

Liverpool play at West Ham tomorrow. But Klopp's attempt to dampen down expectations by suggesting that everyone has dips, is different to Guardiola's rhetoric.

"When you play well," the City coach said, "you don't feel the pressure. We did it in the past."

"But you people say, many times, that we have the perfect team. We are human beings, we play three times every week."

A journalist asked: "Is it a problem that Kevin de Bruyne has been injured this season? Is it harder for David Silva now he is 33?"

Guardiola glowered. "You don't change at 33 – or 33 years and three months!" he responded. "The situation is the same, we have to improve performance."

City have lost four of their last nine matches. The previous four defeats came in a span of 72 games. There is vulnerability, maybe an element of fatigue with always being the team all opponents want to beat.

Emery's Arsenal have limped towards this fixture, winning

three, drawing one, but losing three times in seven games.

Indeed, the old claim that the EPL is the most competitive league in the world, and anyone can beat anyone, might be reasserting itself.

The exception is Manchester United who, since Ole Gunnar Solskjaer took over at Christmas, have risen with such alacrity that United are now within touching distance of the top four.

Since liberating the repressed souls at Old Trafford, the Solskjaer surge up the table has narrowed the gap on Arsenal by nine points, and the same on Chelsea. The Gunners can justifiably claim injuries, especially to defenders, hamper them, and Chelsea seem to have lost enthusiasm for the style that Maurizio Sarri is trying to import from Italy.

In numbers, alone, the alarm bells ring. Arsenal and Chelsea have identical records since Dec 22. Each has won three, drawn one and lost three games in the league. Solskjaer's start, the greatest of any manager in United's history, includes six wins, one draw, no loss.

And in such style, with so many goals, and such a transformation from the likes of Paul Pogba, who

sulked under Jose Mourinho and has contributed to more than half the 19 goals while he was on the pitch (scored six, assisted four) once Mourinho left.

Clearly, the modern multi-millionaire player is hugely difficult to manage. Guardiola's theory is that playing, entertaining and winning is a collective concept in which there is no place for prima donnas or mood players.

His adversary in the dugout today, Emery, had perhaps insurmountable problems trying to build teamwork around Neymar and Kylian Mbappe in Paris.

Emery's Arsenal tenure has barely begun, and to judge by his new club's January shopping, is at a very different end of the spectrum.

Arsenal's one new recruit is Denis Suarez, on loan from Barcelona. This, of course, is not Luis Suarez, the striker, but the former Manchester City youth player who struggled to get a game at Barca.

In fact, Denis Suarez had just 17 minutes in two substitute appearances in LaLiga this season. He ran miles at Sevilla when Emery coached there, and Emery regards Denis Suarez as versatile, energetic and adaptable – a selfless player willing to perform any task on the right, the left or centre of midfield.

"We play against the best on Sunday," Emery said, "but I trust in my players. This is our opportunity to show ourselves."

stsports@sph.com.sg

City have lost four of their last nine matches. The previous four defeats came in a span of 72 games. There is vulnerability, maybe an element of fatigue with always being the team all opponents want to beat.

four-digit draw			
Feb 02 2019			
First	▶	9674	
Second	▶	8141	
Third	▶	2652	
STARTERS			
2189	2707	4871	
4886	5102	5701	
7523	7900	8560	
9818			
CONSOLATIONS			
0471	2829	3861	
4931	6628	7269	
8713	8890	9142	
9730			



Son Heung-min scoring for Tottenham Hotspur in the 83rd minute to break down a stubborn Newcastle for a 1-0 win at Wembley Stadium yesterday. The win took Mauricio Pochettino's men to within four points of leaders Liverpool, who are in action at West Ham tomorrow. PHOTO: REUTERS

SON LIFTS SPURS TO SECOND SPOT

Korean's second goal since returning from Asian Cup ends deadlock against Newcastle

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Tottenham 1
Newcastle 0

LONDON • Tottenham left it late again yesterday. Son Heung-min's second goal in four days since returning from the Asian Cup earned a 1-0 Premier League win over Newcastle that allowed Spurs to leapfrog Manchester City into second place.

Spurs also struck at the death to beat Fulham and Watford in recent weeks to ensure they have kept pace since Harry Kane and Dele Alli were injured.

Mauricio Pochettino's men are within four points of leaders Liverpool (61), who are in action at West Ham tomorrow, but just as significantly, they opened up a 10-point lead on Arsenal in the race for a top-four finish and Champions League football next season.

In keeping with a season of struggles, Tottenham were forced all the way by a dogged Newcastle, who were buoyed by a stunning 2-1 win over Manchester City in midweek.

Lucas Moura headed wide from point-blank range, Erik Lamela hit the woodwork and Christian Eriksen's flick was somehow hooked off the line by Fabian Schär – until Son

settled it seven minutes from time.

"The two games were very important," said the South Korean, who scored the equaliser against Watford in midweek and compensated for Kane's absence with his ninth goal in 10 appearances and his 14th of the season.

"With six points we have had a great week. It was a difficult game, but we are happy to get the six points and we deserved this one."

He had a helping hand from Martin Dubravka, the goalkeeper who let the powerful effort slip under his grasp to undo all his side's good work in holding out for 83 minutes.

Newcastle's club record £20 million signing (\$\$35.5 million), playmaker Miguel Almiron, did not have international clearance to make his debut, so Rafael Benitez named the same side that started

14

Goals Son Heung-Min has been involved in his last 10 games (nine scored, five assisted) for Tottenham.

against City with the same game plan to defend deep and frustrate their opponents.

Fernando Llorente, the 33-year-old match winner against Watford, was benched after playing the full 90 minutes in Spurs' three previous games, leaving Moura to lead the line. But the Brazilian fluffed his lines, as did his teammates despite camping in the Newcastle half.

The hosts forced Dubravka into only one serious save before the break when former Magpies midfielder Moussa Sissoko turned a well-worked corner towards goal.

A similar pattern followed in the second half, but the visitors nearly caught Spurs cold with a flowing counter-attack when Salomon Rondon's powerful header from DeAndre Yedlin's cross came back off the post with Hugo Lloris stranded.

Lloris also had to make a flying save to turn a curling effort from Ayzo Perez behind.

But Spurs laid siege to Newcastle's wall of 10 men and had their reward. Pochettino was delighted by the character of his side, who have bounced back after being knocked out of both domestic Cups.

Asked if he will be supporting Arsenal who travel to City today, he said: "No, no way!"

He also questioned why they are being asked to play their next league game against Leicester on Sunday in the week of their Champions League last-16 first-leg game at home to Borussia Dortmund, who play their fixture on the Saturday.

"Twenty-four hours can make a massive difference," he said.

"It is difficult to understand."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

Leicester's energy a threat to United

LONDON • Ole Gunnar Solskjaer may yet rue being unable to beef up his defence, should Manchester United fail in their bid to make the Premier League's top four.

Today, at Leicester, they will face Harry Maguire, a centre-back Jose Mourinho wanted to sign before the start of this season. The board's refusal to sanction a move deepened divisions and the fallout ended with the manager's December sacking as the team struggled.

Caretaker manager Solskjaer, publicly at least, appears less concerned about the lack of defensive signings but a shortage of quality in that area remains an issue. Leicester's pace in attack may well cause problems and he knows it.

"They've beaten Manchester City and Chelsea over the past couple of months, so it will be a tough game," said the Norwegian. "They are a team full of energy and pace in attack, with Jamie Vardy, Demarai Gray and James Maddison.

"And they defend well when they drop back. It's hard to break them down. It will be a challenge."

Last Tuesday, in the 2-2 home league draw with Burnley, their defensive problems were exposed and they needed a late fightback.

Mourinho was again proven right about his assessment that his four senior centre-backs, Chris Smalling, Phil Jones, Eric Bailly

and Victor Lindelof, were not up to standard. They have kept just four clean sheets in 24 league matches.

Solskjaer preferred Jones and Lindelof as his central pairing, with Bailly as a stand-in.

The 45-year-old has proven in the past that he can solve defensive issues given time.

In his two spells as manager of Norwegian club Molde, their goals-against record improved after his first season, helped by wise investment in the transfer market.

But despite becoming the first Red Devils boss to start with eight wins, six in the league and two in the FA Cup, he may not be kept on beyond this season.

One man who should be around is Anthony Martial, who has just signed a deal that commits him to the club until at least June 2024, with the option for a further year.

Solskjaer has challenged him to follow in the footsteps of Cristiano Ronaldo. He said: "You can't just rely on what you do now."

"I speak about my experience at this club with Cristiano and what Anthony can achieve. I talk about Cristiano's career, what he's made, how he's got there."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LEICESTER V MAN UNITED
Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, 10.05pm

Higuain breaks Blues duck in 5-0 win



Gonzalo Higuain leaps for joy in front of the Stamford Bridge faithful after netting his first goal in Chelsea colours against Huddersfield yesterday. The Argentinian, making his third appearance for the Blues since moving from AC Milan last month, struck in the 16th minute. Eden Hazard added another from the spot in first-half stoppage time. The Chelsea pair added a goal apiece in the second half, with David Luiz scoring the fifth in the dying minutes as the Blues returned to winning ways after a 4-0 midweek defeat at Bournemouth. PHOTO: REUTERS

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

YESTERDAY

- Tottenham 1 Newcastle 0
- Chelsea 5 Huddersfield 0
- Burnley 1 Southampton 1
- Brighton 0 Watford 0
- Crystal Palace 2 Fulham 0
- Everton 1 Wolves 3
- Cardiff v Bournemouth
- Late kick-off

TODAY

- Leicester v Man United
- Ch102 & Ch227, 10.05pm
- Man City v Arsenal
- Ch102 & Ch227, tomorrow, 12.30am

All on Singtel TV & StarHub



Qatar's players with the trophy after beating Japan 3-1 in the Asian Cup final at the Mohammed Bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi on Friday. Their head coach Felix Sanchez led Qatar to their first Asian Under-19 title in 2014. They also reached the U-23 semi-finals last year. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Asian Cup 2019

COPA AMERICA NEXT FOR CHAMPS QATAR

Asian Cup runners-up Japan are also guests at South American tourney starting in June

ABU DHABI • Coming from nowhere to win the Asian Cup is just part of Qatar's long road to their home World Cup in 2022. Felix Sanchez's team are keeping their expectations in check for the Copa America, the South American championship where they are guests along with Japan beginning in June, despite snatching the Asian title as a lowly world No. 93 side. But it is hard to overstate their feat – from zero points in Australia 2015 to their first continental title in record-breaking style. It also means that resource-rich Qatar are finally making headlines for the right reasons after the turbulence that surrounded their successful bid to host world football's showpiece. Almozez Ali's bicycle-kick opener epitomised a stylish triumph, 3-1 over Japan in the final, as he broke Ali Daei's 23-year-old mark for goals at a single Cup. "I'm sorry for breaking Mr Daei's record," a humble Ali said after scoring his ninth of the Cup. "I expected to score goals, maybe three or four, but I didn't expect to score nine." Fittingly for a team who have punched above their weight, Akram Afif struck a boxing-style pose as he celebrated the late penalty to end Japan's resistance,

after they briefly threatened a comeback when 2-1 down. Qatar conceded just one goal all tournament and scored 19, winning all seven games and beating other former champions Saudi Arabia, Iraq and South Korea. They also thrived in a hostile environment in the United Arab Emirates owing to the ongoing Gulf blockade, with their fans largely barred from visiting and home spectators pelting them with shoes and bottles in the semi-finals. The title raised the beguiling possibility of Qatar being crowned champions of both Asia and South America, although they will first have to get out of a group comprising Argentina, Colombia and Paraguay. But Ali said the Copa is about continuing the methodical approach that has already paid dividends.

"We're not expecting to win, but just to learn – because, after the World Cup, the Copa is the biggest competition in the world," he said. "Asia is the weakest continent for football so, in the Copa America, we will learn more. This will help us have a better performance in 2022." After spending many millions of petrodollars on their world-class Aspire Academy, and scouring the world for top coaches, Qatar are beginning to recoup their investment. Head coach Sanchez led Qatar to their first Asian Under-19 title in 2014 and they reached the U-23 semi-finals last year, when Ali was also top scorer. Afif chalked up a tournament-record 10 assists and formed a devastating partnership with Ali, underlining Qatar's cohesion in both defence and attack after years

spent playing together. "We've been together seven years so I know exactly where Akram will be, where he will pass and he always knows what to expect from me," Ali said. "We get along very well together too." Qatar's win sparked jubilant scenes back home but, for the team, bigger goals now lie ahead. "This is one step more to continue developing the team, to play another tournament in the summer and to be ready in 2022 to represent Qatar," Sanchez said. For Japan, captain Maya Yoshida was aggrieved about Uzbek referee Ravshan Irmatov's decision to award a penalty for handball against him after a video review. "That third goal was really tough to accept," he said. "It killed the game. If that's a penalty, I probably have to jump without using my arms. It was accidental but that was the referee's decision." He added: "But they played well and deserve to be champions. "No excuses, we move on." The Samurai Blue are grouped with Uruguay, Chile and Ecuador for the Copa. But he hopes the setback will help them make a breakthrough beyond the last 16 at the World Cup. He said: "Our first target is, of course, to qualify and then get over the wall at which we were stopped last time, the round of 16. That is an objective for Japanese football." AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SportsWorld

Vekic dumps champ Kvitova in Russia

ST PETERSBURG • Defending champion Petra Kvitova of the Czech Republic crashed out of the St Petersburg indoor tennis event after a 6-4, 6-1 quarter-final loss to Donna Vekic on Friday. The Croat levelled their head-to-head record at one apiece, before continuing her run when she beat Russian Vera Zvonareva 6-2, 6-2 to reach the final. She will meet second seed Kiki Bertens of the Netherlands, who beat fourth-seed Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka 7-6 (7-5), 6-2. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Tomic blocked off funding after spat

ADELAIDE • Tennis Australia yesterday accused firebrand Bernard Tomic of deliberately trying to sabotage the nation's Davis Cup team in his spat with captain Lleyton Hewitt and withdrew all support for him. Tomic launched an extraordinary attack on Hewitt during last month's Australian Open, saying "no one likes him any more" while claiming the two-time Grand Slam champion had ruined the national tennis system. Hewitt responded by washing his hands of the player, alleging he had been blackmailed and physically threatened by the combustible 26-year-old. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Sauber renamed Alfa Romeo this season

BERLIN • The Sauber name will disappear from Formula One this season after more than 25 years, with Friday's announcement that the team will be renamed Alfa Romeo Racing. Swiss Peter Sauber, now retired, founded the team in 1970 and then celebrated his debut F1 season in 1993. The Sauber team have been using Ferrari engines for some time and had a collaboration last season with Alfa Romeo, which is also from the Fiat Chrysler Group. DPA

Footballer asks not to be paid while out injured

LONDON • Ishmael Miller has asked Tranmere Rovers to stop paying him while he is out injured. The 31-year-old striker joined the English fourth-tier football club on Jan 7 and scored on his debut in a 3-1 win at Cheltenham Town five days later. But he has been sidelined by a hamstring injury suffered in the next match, against Swindon Town in League Two. In a world of record transfer fees

and wages in football, Tranmere manager Micky Mellon described the gesture as "fantastic". "At this moment, Ishmael's not getting paid by Tranmere," Mellon was reported as saying in the British media. "He came in to see me about a week ago and he said to me, 'Stop my wages until I get fit again.' "I need everybody to understand how big a gesture that is. He wants

Tranmere Rovers to keep moving forward while he's out injured, which is possibly the first time I've heard that." He praised the player for putting the club's welfare first, saying the gesture "says an awful lot about him as a man". "If he had kept getting paid and waited until he got fit, nobody would've blinked an eyelid as that's what's supposed to happen," he

said. "People might say, 'Well, he's in a position where he can do that.' "Well, he doesn't have to do that. He knows how tight things are at this club and where we're at in terms of what we're trying to do." Miller, a former player for West Bromwich Albion, Nottingham Forest, Blackpool and Huddersfield, had joined Tranmere until the end of the season after being released by Oldham Athletic.



Tranmere Rovers striker Ishmael Miller is currently sidelined by a hamstring injury.

Super Bowl Fever: More than 17m may call in sick

ATLANTA • Call it the Super Bowl Fever or the Super Sick Monday. More than 100 million people are expected to tune in to the Super Bowl, noshing on too much food, drinking too much beer, and staying up too late to see the advertisements that run in the fourth quarter. Tomorrow, more than 17 million of them plan to stay home from work. This is according to a United States survey commissioned by The Workforce Institute at Kronos, a software company that helps companies with human resources management. If it comes to pass, the 17.2 million absences will eclipse the 2018 or 2016 estimates. Whether companies will really turn into ghost towns the morning after the New England Patriots-Los

Angeles Rams clash, there are signs of a real productivity hit. "I'm a former corporate recruiter... there were always more notable absences," said Vicki Salemi, the careers expert at job site Monster.com, which also ran a recent small survey of hiring managers, recruiters and job seekers and found that 12 per cent would call in sick. The cost of productivity loss could top US\$4 billion (\$\$5.4 billion), according to an estimate by the outplacement and executive coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas. That includes time people spend discussing Tom Brady's performance on the field, combined with those who do choose to stay home from work. Such surveys are not always na-

tionally representative though, and are commissioned by companies that sell staffing services or HR software products – but still provide a little snapshot of the Monday-after effect of the big game. They say a strong economy could be making it worse. Said Joyce Maroney, executive director of The Workforce Institute at Kronos: "Employees may be feeling more secure in their employment and are more likely to have other options, and think it isn't going to be a deal breaker if they call in sick." Interestingly, its survey also found senior managers were more likely (36 per cent) to say they would not work normal hours, compared to just 20 per cent of more junior and mid-level employees. "That says something about trust,

and who's empowered to do what in the workplace," Maroney said. Also, more bosses have a sense of humour about the topic than one might think, with nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) in its study thinking it is funny when colleagues call out sick the day after the big game. Shawn Anderson, who runs a nearly 50-person tech firm called PDQ.com in Salt Lake City, has had to say something to employees who tried to make the most of the four-day work week schedule he offers. "Usually before a long weekend, I'll say, 'Go have a blast but please watch out for vodka virus or the Super Bowl bug or the Budweiser flu,'" he said, noting he might mention it lightly again. "There's a lot of sarcasm and joking in this." WASHINGTON POST



LA Rams fans Katelyn (left) and Nancy Delgado show their team-themed donuts on Friday, ahead of today's Super Bowl final. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

FANS RUE STARHUB'S LACK OF PGA TOUR COVERAGE

Telecasts ended Jan 1 after the telco could not agree on terms with event's new rights owner

David Lee

Golf fans here have taken a swing at StarHub after learning that the United States PGA Tour did not make the cut for golf tournaments that will be screened here by the cable TV provider.

StarHub had aired PGA Tour events as part of its sports group add-on – currently priced at \$21.40 monthly for TV subscription and \$9.90 for over-the-top platforms – as far back as 2005, but stopped broadcasting them from Jan 1.

Andrew Lim, a 37-year-old trader, said: “I got a letter from StarHub about this but it was a surprise and disappointment because I was looking forward to watching Tiger Woods continue his comeback on the tour.”

Jeremy Siah, a 56-year-old retiree, added: “Quite a few of my golfing buddies are upset. We signed up for the sports package mainly because of the US PGA Tour and now it is gone and we still have to pay the same price?”

It is stated in StarHub's terms and conditions that the service provider may, at its discretion and without notice to subscribers, “remove, modify or deny access to any content”.

A StarHub spokesman said: “Our priority is to secure quality content at the right value for all StarHub TV customers.

“While we did not manage to reach an agreement to renew the PGA Tour, we continue to deliver key golfing events like the Masters, US Open, PGA Championship,

LPGA and the Asian and European Tour.

“We also enhanced our sports content line-up at no additional cost with the Ladies European Tour, EFL Championship, EFL Carabao Cup, Coppa Italia, Serie A and ITTF (International Table Tennis Federation). We remain committed to offering the best sporting action and will continue to be on the lookout for more.”

In previous years, StarHub had negotiated directly with the PGA Tour for the broadcast rights.

But last year, the PGA Tour entered a US\$2 billion (\$\$2.7 billion), 12-year partnership with Discovery for the latter to distribute the live linear rights for the tournament to 220 markets and territories, including Singapore.

It is understood that during negotiations with StarHub, Discovery had refused to offer the PGA Tour as standalone content, but only as a bundle deal with other channels.

As both parties could not agree on the terms, the PGA Tour will no longer be shown on StarHub.

Fans here can still watch the PGA Tour via GolfTV, an international golf-streaming service unveiled by Discovery and the PGA Tour last year, with the cheapest annual fee option priced at US\$89.99.

When told of the background, Lim said: “I understand that telcos shouldn't be held to ransom by rights holders but I hope that discussions between the relevant parties can still continue to ensure a win-win scenario to retain consumers.”

davidlee@sph.com.sg



Rickie Fowler on his way to a six-under 65 for a 129 total at the Phoenix Open at Scottsdale, Arizona, on Friday. He is just one stroke ahead of Justin Thomas (66), also his housemate for this tournament. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Garcia disqualified for slamming club

KING ABDULLAH ECONOMIC CITY (Saudi Arabia) • Spain's Sergio Garcia was disqualified from the inaugural Saudi International yesterday for serious misconduct.

The world No. 27, the Masters champion in 2017, shot a one-over 71 but is believed to have damaged a couple of greens at the Royal Greens Golf and Country Club after slamming his putter in frustration.

He thus became the first player on the European Tour to be disqualified under Rule 1.2a, which deals with player conduct. The rule declares that “players are expected to play in the spirit of the game by acting with integrity, showing consideration to others and taking good care of the course”.

Garcia, who tied for seventh at the SMBC Singapore Open just two weeks ago, apologised for his behaviour and said in a statement released by the Tour: “I respect the decision of my disqualification.

“In frustration, I damaged a couple of greens, for which I apologise, and I have informed my fellow players it will never happen again.”

Some players reported deep indentation marks on a couple of holes, including the seventh, although the Tour did not name the holes on which the alleged transgressions took place.

Garcia was playing with Italy's Renato Paratore and was later seen involved in long discussions with Tour officials, including chief executive Keith Pelley.

American Dustin Johnson (65) and China's Li Haotong (62) lead the field on 16-under 194.

Meanwhile, world No. 1 Justin Rose has announced that he will take a month off after missing the cut on Friday.

The Englishman shot 70 and 72 to miss the cut by two strokes with his two-over 142 total and will not return to action until the March 7-10 Arnold Palmer Invitational in Florida, where he will start his build-up towards the year's first Major, the April 11-14 Masters at Augusta National.

He cited jet lag for his underwhelming performance in Saudi Arabia and said his focus now was

on “freshening up for the Masters”.

“My goal is to win more and to win Major championships this year,” he added.

In Arizona, Rickie Fowler birdied the final four holes but could not shake off his buddy and housemate Justin Thomas, who could only par his last three in the second round of the Phoenix Open.

Fowler fired a six-under 65 at Scottsdale TPC for a 13-under 129 total, one in front of Thomas (66) and two clear of South African Branden Grace, whose 64 was the best score on Friday.

REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SAUDI INTERNATIONAL
Day 4: StarHub Ch204, 5.30pm

Sarawak loses \$1.65m for not hosting IPC event

KUCHING • Sarawak stands to lose some RM5 million (\$\$1.65 million), by conservative estimates, after Malaysia was stripped of the rights to host the 2019 World Para Swimming Championships last Sunday.

With over 600 competitors expected, the hotel industry will bear the brunt of the decision, suffering losses of at least RM\$1.5 million, said John Teo, honorary secretary general of the Malaysian Association of Hotels Sarawak Chapter.

Malaysia, which does not have diplomatic ties with Israel, would not allow Israeli athletes to enter the country. That led to the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) taking away the event, which would have been held in Kuching

from July 29 to Aug 4.

Teo said: “The swimmers and coaches stay up to two weeks, although the championships last for one week. The hotel would not be able to fill up the occupancy within (this) short span of time after the cancellation of the championships.”

Sarawak has spent two years preparing for the event.

Travel agencies, restaurants, airlines, transport companies and shopping centres are also affected. Travel agencies handled air tickets and transport for competitors. Some even bought new vehicles and such losses have not been in-

cluded, said Teo.

Sightseeing numbers will no longer get a boost too. Participants had been expected to visit the likes of Sibul, Miri and Mulu national park after the event, which doubles as a qualifier for the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics.

Sarawak Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture, Youth and Sports Abdul Karim Rahman said many were hoping for a “turning point” but the state government is not empowered to issue visas. “We are unable to do anything unless the federal government changes its stand.”

He said Sarawak would have to abide by the federal government's decision.

SIN CHEW DAILY/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS

Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Sun, 3 Feb 2019				
A League	Sydney FC	Melbourne City	2.00pm	LW
Spanish League	Villarreal	Espanyol	7.00pm	LW / SB
Dutch League	Excelsior	Feyenoord	7.15pm	LW / SB
Italian League	SPAL	Torino	7.30pm	LW / SB
Dutch League	PSV	Fortuna Sittard	9.30pm	LW / SB
Italian League	Udinese	Fiorentina	10.00pm	LW / SB
English Premier	Leicester	Manchester Utd	10.05pm	LW / SB
German League	Augsburg	Mainz	10.30pm	LW / SB
Spanish League	Real Betis	Atletico Madrid	11.15pm	LW / SB
Mon, 4 Feb 2019				
English Premier	Manchester City	Arsenal	12.30am	LW / SB
German League	Stuttgart	Freiburg	1.00am	LW / SB
Italian League	Inter	Bologna	1.00am	LW / SB
Italian League	Roma	Milan	3.30am	LW
Spanish League	Real Madrid	Alaves	3.45am	LW

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INDIA

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Weekly tweetbits



HOT SHOT
“Such a tough day until i saw this lovely picture thank you Audrey.” Chinese golfer Li Haotong’s fan moment brings him respite. He was docked two strokes at the Dubai Desert Classic after violating a new and, some say “grossly unfair,” rule.

Dear Li, I hope you become the best golfer in the world when dealing with love is



SWEET TWEET
Manchester City’s Kyle Walker revives this World Cup meme after Harry Maguire’s (above) Leicester held Liverpool to a draw. But his sense of humour was hauled up as the City fullback promptly deleted his tweet, just not before it went viral.



CAUGHT ON CAMERA
Arsenal’s players sending their Chinese New Year wishes, in their best grasp of Mandarin, all for a red packet in return. **WATCH:** goo.gl/46Vd5b



THROWBACK
“Hunger for more #tbt #nevergiveup” Lewis Hamilton feeling nostalgic over the last time he was stocking up on silverware.

PHOTOS: TWITTER/HAOTONG_LI, KYLEWALKER2, INSTAGRAM/LEWIS HAMILTON, YOUTUBE/NICOSFUNLEARNING

SUNWOLVES’ DIVERSITY A STRENGTH: KUMATE

Manager says team can draw on the best from the squad’s various cultures, backgrounds

Xener Gill

Super Rugby team HITO-Communications Sunwolves have two homes and eight nationalities in their squad.

The Japan-based team, who have also called the National Stadium in Kallang home since 2017, are made up of players from Japan, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Fiji, Tonga, Georgia and South Korea.

Having this level of diversity can pose many challenges, such as language and cultural barriers, but Sunwolves team manager James Kumate insists that it is one of his team’s strengths.

“Communication is an ongoing challenge as is understanding cultural processes and thought,” he conceded to the Sunday Times.

“However, it is also one of our major strengths as we are forced to become world-class in how we communicate, connect and review so

that we all have clarity.”

Being a multi-cultural team also allows the Sunwolves to draw on the best from the various cultures, ways of thinking and rugby backgrounds to make an “exciting brand of rugby” on the field.

“Off the field, it means we become a tight-knit group as we build our culture around the only common thing that binds us all – the Sunwolves,” he added.

“Our culture is something extremely unique and able to transcend differences.”

The Sunwolves cope with the challenges by having bilingual staff like Kumate and a translator to ensure that everyone is on the same page. The team also conduct one-to-one meetings with the players to clarify doubts.

Kumate added that the team have a strong purpose and clear values that everyone contributes to.

“The more involved you are in the building process, the more in-

vested you are (in the team),” he said. “Everyone in the organisation has made sacrifices and because of that, our desire to make this a successful team burns stronger.”

The Sunwolves also travel extensively as many of their games are played internationally. The team acclimatise to the different environments by being out in the sun and through maintaining a positive mindset.

“We are a team that want to be unique and innovative in what we do and how we do it. We are who we are and our desire is to make this team, and everything it stands for, a lasting success,” said Kumate.

The Sunwolves open their season on Feb 16 at the Singapore Sports Hub against the Cell C Sharks and will return for their second game here on March 23, when they will face the Emirates Lions.

Last year, they won their lone game in Singapore, beating South African team Bulls 42-37.

xenerg@sph.com.sg

• Tickets (\$15-\$170) are on sale at sportshub.com.sg.

ALL FOR ONE

Off the field, it means we become a tight-knit group as we build our culture around the only common thing that binds us all – the Sunwolves.



JAMES KUMATE, team manager of the Sunwolves, on his multi-cultural side drawing the best from various cultures.



The Sunwolves (in red) will play the Cell C Sharks at the Singapore Sports Hub on Feb 16. They will return for their second game, against the Emirates Lions, on March 23 at the same venue. They played only one match here last year, beating South African team Bulls 42-37. PHOTO COURTESY OF SINGAPORE SPORTS HUB

Irving sends teaser with July 1 remark

LOS ANGELES • Kyrie Irving, who could become a free agent at the end of the season, finished with 23 points, 10 rebounds and six assists as the Boston Celtics won 113-99 at the struggling New York Knicks.

Friday’s National Basketball Association contest came just one day after the Knicks traded injured Kristaps Porzingis to the Dallas Mavericks, which will give New York the funds to go after top free agents this summer.

And the Madison Square Garden home fans made their feelings known, giving Irving a loud ovation when the line-ups were announced and chanting, “We want Kyrie!” in the third quarter.

“It’s nothing but a distraction at this point,” said Irving, who was

born in Melbourne, Australia, but grew up in New Jersey.

“I’m appreciative of the fan support I get in any arena,” he said. “Obviously what’s going on in terms of that noise and commentary is just a bunch of nonsense right now.”

The Knicks fans’ admiration might be misdirected as he already made a point at a Celtics’ fan event last year, telling the crowd he would re-sign with Boston.

But when asked after the game if his mind has changed about remaining a Celtic, he said: “Ask me July 1.”

Marcus Morris added 18 points for the Celtics, who won for the eighth time in nine games.

Damyeane Dotson scored 22 points and Kevin Knox had 21 for

the hapless Knicks, who lost a team record 13th straight home game.

They also lost their 12th straight game after losing 24 of 27 games over December and last month.

In Thursday’s multi-player deal, the Knicks gave up Porzingis, Tim Hardaway, Courtney Lee and Trey Burke to the Dallas Mavericks and received Dennis Smith, DeAndre Jordan and Wesley Matthews, plus two future first-round picks.

The Knicks’ new players were not available, so they started Dotson and Kadeem Allen as guards.

In Denver, the Nuggets nearly kept the red-hot James Harden to under 30 points as they beat Houston 136-122 to end a nine-game losing streak against the Rockets.

At the Pepsi Centre in Colorado,

Nikola Jokic had 31 points and 13 rebounds while Malik Beasley (35) and Torrey Craig (22 off the bench) had career highs for Denver, who last beat the Rockets in 2015.

Denver played without their starting back court. Jamal Murray missed his fourth straight game with a sprained left ankle and Gary Harris was out with a right adductor strain.

Harden scored 30 points to stretch his streak to 25 games of scoring 30 or more but needed a late three to keep the streak alive.

The NBA’s Most Valuable Player had a difficult night; during one stretch, he missed 10 of 11 shots and four free throws as he finished nine of 21 from the field.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

BASKETBALL

ABL Spore Slingers v CLS Knights (OCBC Arena, StarHub Ch201, 4pm), Alab Pilipinas v Saigon Heat (Ch202, 7pm).

CRICKET

5th & final ODI NZ v India (Singtel TV Ch123 & StarHub Ch236, 10am).

FOOTBALL

English Premier League Leicester v Man United (10.05pm), Man City v Arsenal (tomorrow, 12.30am) – Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227.

Spanish LaLiga Villarreal v Espanyol (6.55pm), Betis v Atletico Madrid (11.10pm), Eibar v Girona (tomorrow, 1.25am), Real Madrid v Alaves (tomorrow, 3.45am) – StarHub Ch213.

GOLF

European Tour Saudi International: Day 4 (StarHub Ch204, 5.30pm).

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

UFC Fight Night Assuncao v Moraes 2 (Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208, 9am).

RUGBY

World Sevens, Sydney Q-finals (7.30am), s-finals (11am) & finals (4pm) – StarHub Ch202.

TOMORROW

CRICKET

Test Series Australia v Sri Lanka (Singtel TV Ch123 & StarHub Ch236, 7.30am).

FOOTBALL

English Premier League West Ham v

Liverpool (Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, Tuesday, 4am). Spanish LaLiga Rayo Vallecano v Leganes (StarHub Ch213, Tuesday, 4am).

For latest updates, go to singtelv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

Fitness

PROBLEM WITH WELLNESS GOAL?

Consider exercise equivalents – the amount of exercise needed to burn calories consumed

It is just over a month into the new year, and you have stuck with your fitness routine but have not seen the scale budge.

It may be time to look at calories in and calories out – and whether you have a realistic view of that equation.

Weight loss is a result of creating calorie deficits in the body, which can be done both by calorie cutting on the food side and increased energy expenditure on the exercise side.

But, as you might expect, there is a human tendency to overestimate how many calories we burn during (and after) exercising, while underestimating the number of calories we consume.

That is where the concept of exercise equivalents – the amount of exercise needed to burn roughly the same number of calories in a food item – can be useful.

Keep in mind that these are rough

values, and that an occasional indulgence need not be followed with wind sprints. The best way to think of exercise equivalents is as a tool that can “help make us more aware of what we put into our bodies”, as Ben Fidler, a Washington DC-based personal trainer, puts it.

This is not to single out doughnuts but consider a chocolate-glazed one with sprinkles from Dunkin’ Donuts, which is 290 calories according to the company’s website.

The average Singaporean who weighs 64kg, according to the Health Promotion Board’s HealthHub portal, would have to spend about 90 minutes of normal weight training or about 34 minutes of running at 8kmh to burn these calories.

These figures come from the American Council on Exercise’s on-line physical activity calorie counter, on which you can plug in your weight to see what exercise, at

what intensity and for how long you would have to engage in to burn a certain number of calories.

Many restaurants provide calorie information. But they do not offer exercise equivalents.

For Chicago resident Steffen Jacobsen, 41, who does boot camp and weighs 100kg, it would take about one hour of running at the 8kmh pace to burn 800 calories.

“That gives me pause,” he says. “At this age, it’s all a trade-off. If you eat that one cookie, it’s like you negate all your hard work, at least from a weight-loss perspective.”

He acknowledges that working out has many benefits other than keeping weight under control, such as muscle-building and flexibility.

Katherine Basbaum, a registered dietitian with the University of Virginia Health System, agrees that for weight-loss purposes, exercise equivalents can be a helpful ingredient in understanding calories.

“It’s not a magic bullet, but I see it as one of several tools to understand weight loss,” she says.

For example, she says, consider a person who wants to lose 0.45kg a

week, which is the equivalent of creating a roughly 3,500-calorie deficit or 500 per day. It can be created with a combination of:

- 250-calorie energy expenditure: Increase exercise quota. For instance, add 30 minutes of slow running for a 59kg person.
- 250-calorie decrease: For example, skip a daily whole-milk latte.

Looking more carefully at how much exercise is equivalent to the calories in some of your favourite treats will, hopefully, help you make better choices about food.

But do not just consider calories. A 1,500-calorie bag of potato chips could theoretically fuel a roughly 68kg sedentary person for a day. But you would be hungry quickly because they contain negligible amounts of protein and fibre.

By way of comparison and by no means a nutrition suggestion: 1,500 calories of brown rice, which is seven or eight cups, is packed with fibre and protein. The equivalent for broccoli? About 5½kg.

Instead of focusing on calories, Basbaum has patients look at fat, fibre, sodium, protein and other macro- and micronutrients to home in on what types of food best fuel the body and its specific needs. The needs of an athlete are very different from those of a desk jockey.

While Fidler agrees that exercise equivalents can be used to help you make healthy choices, he cautions against making workouts seem like a penance. In the end, the key is to find daily exercise and healthy food you like so you can sustain the habits over time.

WASHINGTON POST

HotBods

Text and pictures by Ong Wee Jin



Charles Spencer, 32
IT security management consultant

Height: 1.81m Weight: 84kg

Exercise regimen: I exercise every day. The foundation of my training is weightlifting: a 45-minute session at 6am and two compound movements like deadlifts and squats or bench and pull-ups for 30 minutes. This is always followed by high tempo, dynamic resistance training like ball smashes, sledges, body weight circuit. I’ve started to swim a lot more since moving to Singapore. I’m a complete amateur at yoga but it challenges my weakest points, so the value is high.

Diet: I delay breakfast until after 9am and stop eating about 7pm. I eat often and have smaller meals. They are rarely heavy-duty carb dishes, always protein heavy and I keep simple sugars out of my diet. My vice is peanut butter. I’m not overly strict. I’m also a coffee addict but I only ever drink it black.



Becky Xia, 35
Sales director

Height: 1.55m Weight: 46kg

Exercise regimen: I started exercising only one year ago. I was skinny and felt weak as I had never exercised. I started with Muay Thai. Now it’s Muay Thai once a week and weights four to five times a week, one to two hours each session. Every session will be focused on one body part. Every morning I do some cardio, like inclined treadmill walking for about 30 minutes. I really enjoy the exercise. For me, the motivation is to get stronger; it was never about the body image.

Diet: Previously I ate out at hawker centres and restaurants a lot, which is a bit unhealthy because of the amount of oil and salt used. I try to cook at home which is a lot healthier. My diet is high in protein and low in fats. I usually eat salad for lunch. For dinner it’s steak, chicken or fish. The key is to eat higher quality protein and lower unhealthy fat and less processed carbs. On weekends I don’t really control my diet, so I eat anything like steamboat, pizza or fried chicken. No soft drinks or alcohol.

SCAN AND WATCH
Hot bods videos and more:
instagram.com/straits_times



Bak kwa and pineapple tarts are some snacks that pile on the calories for Chinese New Year revellers.
ST FILE PHOTOS

Walking off the festive calories

As Chinese New Year approaches, [Shape Singapore](#) offers some food for thought. Calorie calculations are based on a 55kg woman who is walking at a moderate pace. Nutritional information is taken from the Health Promotion Board and MyFitnessPal.

YU SHENG (PER SERVING)

561kcal

The combination of preserved vegetables, sesame seeds, fish and crackers is definitely tasty, but yu sheng is often drizzled with oil as well.

To burn it off, walk

2hr 52min

BAK KWA (PER SLICE)

370kcal

These slices of barbecued pork jerky are sticky, chewy and oh-so-tasty, but they are really one of the biggest calorie bombs of the festive season. Just two slices pack more calories than a plate of chicken rice or a bowl of laksa.

To burn it off, walk

1hr 53min

KUEH LAPIS (PER SLICE)

237kcal

This tasty layered cake is actually made with copious amounts of butter and sugar. Share a slice with a friend if you really cannot resist.

To burn it off, walk

1hr 13min

PINEAPPLE TART (PER PIECE)

93kcal

What is Chinese New Year without some tasty, buttery pineapple tarts? Savour every bite of these though, because just four pieces contain more calories than a bowl of rice.

To burn it off, walk

28min

CASHEW NUT COOKIE (PER PIECE)

62kcal

This butter cookie is easily identified by the cashew nut on top of it. But do not be fooled into thinking that it is healthy just because it is made with nuts – each piece still packs high amounts of fat and cholesterol.

To burn it off, walk

19min

LOVE LETTER (PER PIECE)

56kcal

These crispy, crumbly goodies are made with flour, eggs, coconut milk and sugar, so it is a good idea to not go overboard with them.

To burn it off, walk

17min

MANDARIN ORANGE (PER ORANGE)

39kcal

This may not boast the lowest calorie count, but this is still the healthiest snack you can eat this New Year. Mandarin oranges are high in vitamins and fibre, plus they are unprocessed and very low in fat.

To burn it off, walk

12min

KUEH BULOH (PER PIECE)

34kcal

These mini sponge cakes are also known as kueh bahulu. These fluffy treats are a lower-calorie alternative if you want to nibble on something sweet.

To burn it off, walk

10min

DRIED SHRIMP ROLL (PER PIECE)

23kcal

Also known as hae bee hiam, these tiny shrimp rolls are insanely addictive. The bad news? Each piece is deep fried and high in saturated fat – bummer for your waistline and your heart.

To burn it off, walk

7min

KUEH BANGKIT (PER PIECE)

15kcal

These coconut-flavoured cookies simply melt in your mouth. Make sure you watch how many you pop though, since you surely will not be able to stop at just one.

To burn it off, walk

4.5min

PRAWN CRACKER (PER PIECE)

15kcal

When it comes to perfectly fried prawn crackers, each piece leaves you wanting more. These savoury snacks may feel very light but are actually full of fat and cholesterol.

To burn it off, walk

4.5min

ATE A PIECE OF EVERYTHING?

1,505kcal

To burn it off, walk

7hr 40min

Insight



Invest
Tips for retail
investors in 2019
B18

B

PUNISHMENT v REHABILITATION



After 20 years of tackling hardcore drug abuse with long-term imprisonment, the Government has changed its approach with a bigger focus on rehabilitation. Insight looks at why this is happening now **B4&5**

HAN FOOK KWANG

SAF needs to listen to its servicemen, both past and present **B2**



IT CHANGED MY LIFE

'My philosophy has always been to hire whoever is better than me'

Liew Mun Leong **B3**

TOH WEN LI

What's so bad about feeling proud to be Chinese while thinking in English? **B6**



CHUA MUI HOONG

Put the hawker at the centre of hawker culture **B10**

ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM ILLUSTRATION AND DESIGN: CHNG CHOON HIONG

I toured the home of master potter Iskandar Jalil.

Toh Wen Li
Journalist
The Straits Times



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The Sunday Times says

Shopping for change along Orchard

Plans for rejuvenating Orchard Road were unveiled last week by government agencies after a six-month study and consultations with stakeholders. There are suggestions to give four zones along the 2.4km stretch more character: from emphasising arts and artisanal choices in Tanglin and positioning Somerset as a youth hub, to enhancing overground links at the Orchard-Pater-son road junction and rejuvenating Istana Park with themed gardens. These are achievable ideas.

But planners need to also address a core issue with Orchard Road: retail mix. Higher rentals over the years have meant that the tenant mix has become increasingly repetitive along this premier shopping stretch, as bigger brands take over prime space and many of them open multiple branches. This sameness does not help draw foot traffic or encourage spending, as reflected in the falling tourist shopping dollar. Planners must also account for changing habits as savvy Singapore-

ans shop online and spend especially when they go overseas. If Orchard Road is to be refreshed in the long term, landlords need to look hard at their curation of tenants and the pursuit of rental re- turns at the expense of retail variety and interest.

The opening of Design Orchard, with a line-up of 61 local brands, is a promising start to broaden- ing the retail offerings. As buying habits change, shopping streets need to become experiential life- style hubs. Some malls offer lifestyle destinations:

VivoCity has library@harbourfront; and the new Funan Centre will have arts company Wild Rice as an anchor tenant, complete with a fully equipped theatre space. Other examples internationally in- clude New York's Rockefeller Plaza, with NBC's live broadcast studio; and Tokyo's Ginza Six, which incorporates a Noh theatre. In this respect, the suggestion to return the orchard to Orchard Road, with more trees and shrubs, already presents an attractive answer to the retail slump.

ThinkingAloud

SAF training deaths: Listen to what soldiers say

Top brass must get down to brass tacks and study feedback from national servicemen and parents



Han Fook Kwang

Editor-at-Large

It has been almost two weeks since actor Aloysius Pang's unexpected death in a training accident during his NSman stint.

The outpouring of national grief has died down somewhat, and so has the outrage/anger/worry/ concern – take your pick, it ran the full range of emotions – over why and how it happened.

Singapore had not seen such public shock and disbelief over the accidental death of one soldier.

One mother sent me this message: "Previously I told my son... it is an honour to serve your country, and I used to frown upon those who defaulted or tried to stay out. Now I am hesitant... It's every parent's worry: Will my perfectly healthy, intelligent son come out alive?"

Another one said: "Now every mother will want her son to serve as a storeman."

There have been many other reactions, speculating why he was crushed by the barrel of the giant gun as it was lowered while he was inside the vehicle, what it says about training and safety in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), and what needs to be done to prevent such accidents.

An official inquiry is now looking into the incident. Last week, the SAF, mindful that there have been five training-related deaths in the past 16 months, announced the setting up of a new Inspector-General's Office (IGO) to focus on safety issues.

Clearly, public confidence in the army needs to be restored – quickly.

It should start with closely listening and taking in what people are saying, particularly the voices of national servicemen, active and operationally ready, and their parents.

National service (NS) is a unique institution in Singapore, and part of the uniqueness has to do with the sheer number of men who have been conscripted over the 52 years since its introduction.

That's more than a million



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

Singaporeans across all ages with first-hand experience of what it is and was like serving in the various branches of the armed forces.

I don't think there are any jobs or areas of public interest with so many people having such intimate knowledge, and who would have a lot to say about precisely some of the issues being currently raised.

They speak from direct experience and their comments should be taken seriously.

I have found that, on issues concerning NS and national security, public discussions – including those online – are usually more informed and considered than over other issues.

Equally pertinent are the voices of parents of NS sons, including fathers who had served as well.

They too have been deeply involved in the NS story and have as much to say about it.

In fact, the feedback from these two groups is an incredible resource for the SAF, not just over training deaths but on NS in general. Some of the questions they raise:

- Should operationally ready NSmen doing their yearly training like Aloysius be asked to undertake specialised repair work when they might not have kept up to date with the tasks at

hand and, if they are required to do so, how to make sure they are brought up to speed?

- With the NS period reduced to two years, is there a danger that training is rushed and hence inadequate, increasing the likelihood of errors and accidents?

- Do commanders know what is happening on the ground and are they close to the men to find out the real issues?

- Although the quality of training has improved over the years, is there a risk that some operationally ready NSmen treat the yearly stints as slack time, away from their real work, and

their attitude, if not corrected, could compromise the safety of others.

I hope the IGO will look into these issues and, more importantly, find a way of canvassing the large body of full-time and operationally ready servicemen who will have more to say.

Beyond these specific questions, there is the wider issue of confidence in the SAF, which has taken a beating and which is implicit in the comments of the two mothers I quoted.

They have no technical knowledge or experience to offer but I believe most parents have great respect for the SAF, at its quality and professionalism which is widely acknowledged worldwide.

Which is why they cannot understand the recent accidents, and have reacted so emotionally.

If the deaths had been the result of a war exercise with realistic battle scenes or from extreme training conditions pushing soldiers to their physical limits, they might not have been so inexplicable.

But Aloysius was crushed in a stationary vehicle with two other men inside. They were technicians doing work on it, and so presumably would have detailed knowledge of the equipment including safety issues.

An earlier incident in November last year seemed as puzzling when 22-year old Corporal First Class Liu Kai was killed in a Land Rover after it was hit by a reversing armoured vehicle.

Five training deaths in the past 16 months have raised questions over whether there is a systemic problem with safety awareness in the SAF.

There is an even wider issue that is beyond the scope of the IGO: How should Singaporeans view training deaths?

While every casualty is one too many and every measure should be taken to prevent the next one, the painful truth is that it is an inevitable reality faced by every army.

In the United States, more servicemen were killed in training than those killed in actual combat every year since 2015, and this in a country that is actively fighting several wars around the world.

In Britain, 141 armed forces personnel were killed during training or on exercise from 2000 to last year.

Most Singaporeans believe the country needs a strong SAF to defend its sovereignty, and support what is being done to ensure this through compulsory NS.

But training a credible army is not a risk-free enterprise, involving the use of dangerous weapons that kill and maim.

While most people accept that soldiers will be killed in actual warfare, they react very differently to training deaths.

But the two are twin barrels of the same gun.

Keeping the peace during peacetime is a dangerous undertaking too, and lives can be lost as a result.

How do we make Singaporeans understand and accept this reality?

It requires better communication with the people, starting with listening to what they have to say.

Finally, though, Singaporeans will be persuaded only if they believe the SAF has done all it can to ensure adequate training and safety awareness across all levels of the organisation.

That's what the top brass needs to do – pronto.

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- The writer is also a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.

ItChangedMyLife

I always hire people who are better than me

Without good staff, Changi Airport Group chairman says he wouldn't have come so far



Wong Kim Hoh

Senior Writer

In 2007, Mr Liew Mun Leong – then chief executive of CapitaLand – received a staggering \$20.52 million bonus for helping the property developer achieve a record profit of \$2.76 billion that year.

He is a wealthy man, but wealth, he says, means nothing to him.

"I've settled my life, my children's lives and I've also looked at the future and there's nothing I need that I cannot afford," says the 72-year-old who has three children and seven grandchildren.

Now the chairman of the Changi Airport Group (CAG), he says he is contented with his home (a landed property in Chancery Lane) and his car (a BMW 7 series). He no longer buys expensive timepieces and now wears an Apple watch.

In fact, his private banker has told him he can live comfortably from the interest on his wealth.

"But I don't want to work on my money. I want to work on my grey matter and if possible, grow it," he says with a chuckle.

It explains why he still holds not one, but several jobs. Besides CAG, which spearheads airport development, he is chairman of Surbana Jurong, a consultancy in urban and infrastructure development.

He sits on several boards and is also provost's chair and professor (practice) on pro bono service at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Business School, Faculty of Engineering and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

"Since stepping down from CapitaLand in 2013, I've been even busier. But I enjoy it," he says. "When you're dying on your bed, you'll ask yourself: 'Are you satisfied, is it worth it, have you done enough, have you lived a full life?'"

"I have a full life, but I still want to continue," he declares.

One of the rare few to have made a mark in both spheres, Mr Liew spent 22 years in government service and has clocked 26 years in the private sector.

The fifth of six children, his beginnings were humble.

His father was a fitter, and his mother, a housewife. "Two of my older brothers died from food poisoning during the war," he says.

His parents changed his middle name from Kok to Mun so that the Grim Reaper would not come for him. "To break the curse, I also had to address my father as 'Ah Sook' and my mother as 'Ah Dai'," he says, using the Cantonese words for "uncle" and "elder".

His home, growing up, was a pre-war terraced house in Jalan Besar shared with five other families.

"Each family had only one room and there were seven of us: my parents, my three siblings and me, and an adoptive uncle."

Mr Liew slept in a collapsible canvas bed under a dim light in the corridor. "It was quite comfortable, but it had bed bugs. Every Sunday, I had to pour boiling water on the bed joints to kill them," he says.

Because of his success in the cor-

porate world, people often assume, much to his irritation, that he attended well-known schools like Anglo-Chinese or Raffles Institution.

"I didn't. I went to gangster-infested schools," says the former student of May North Primary and Queenstown Technical Secondary.

In 1959, he had to retake his Primary School Leaving Examination because of an exam leak. He failed.

That earned him a major thrashing from his mother, who made him kneel under the table next to the altar of Tua Pek Gong, a deity worshipped in many Taoist households.

The punishment was harsh because the failure meant Mr Liew could not continue his education in a secondary school.

Nobody knew what to do until a fellow classmate – who also failed the exam – suggested that they go back to May North and ask to be readmitted.

"So we repeated our Primary 6. I was top boy that year; he was second. The incident made me develop a fear of failure. I never failed again in school after that."

His decision to study engineering – he was from the then University of Singapore's first batch of civil engineering graduates – was influenced by his father, who worked under an engineer he idolised.

"He said: 'If you can't become an engineer, at least get a job under a fan'," he says, explaining that his father wanted him to have a white-collar job.

He was the first among his classmates to land a job at the National Iron and Steel Mills when he graduated in 1970. But barely half a year later, he was called up for national service. It changed his life.

He was recruited into Mindef, where he met the likes of the late Dr Goh Keng Swee, former deputy prime minister and one of Singapore's founding fathers.

Mindef's first civil engineer, he was tasked with developing and building military camps and infrastructure. It was a big job, one which awakened his latent leadership instincts.

From Dr Goh and a few other mentors, he learnt the art of "disregarding the rules and getting things done". "We were trained to make decisions by being empowered. We could call the shots, as long as we were not corrupt and did not do things for our own interest."

He took this philosophy with him when he went to the Public Works Department (PWD) in the mid-1970s, where he was involved in the building of Changi Airport Terminals 1 and 2 from day one.

"I don't circumvent rules; I break ground," he says proudly as he starts telling stories of how he beat bureaucracy to get things done.

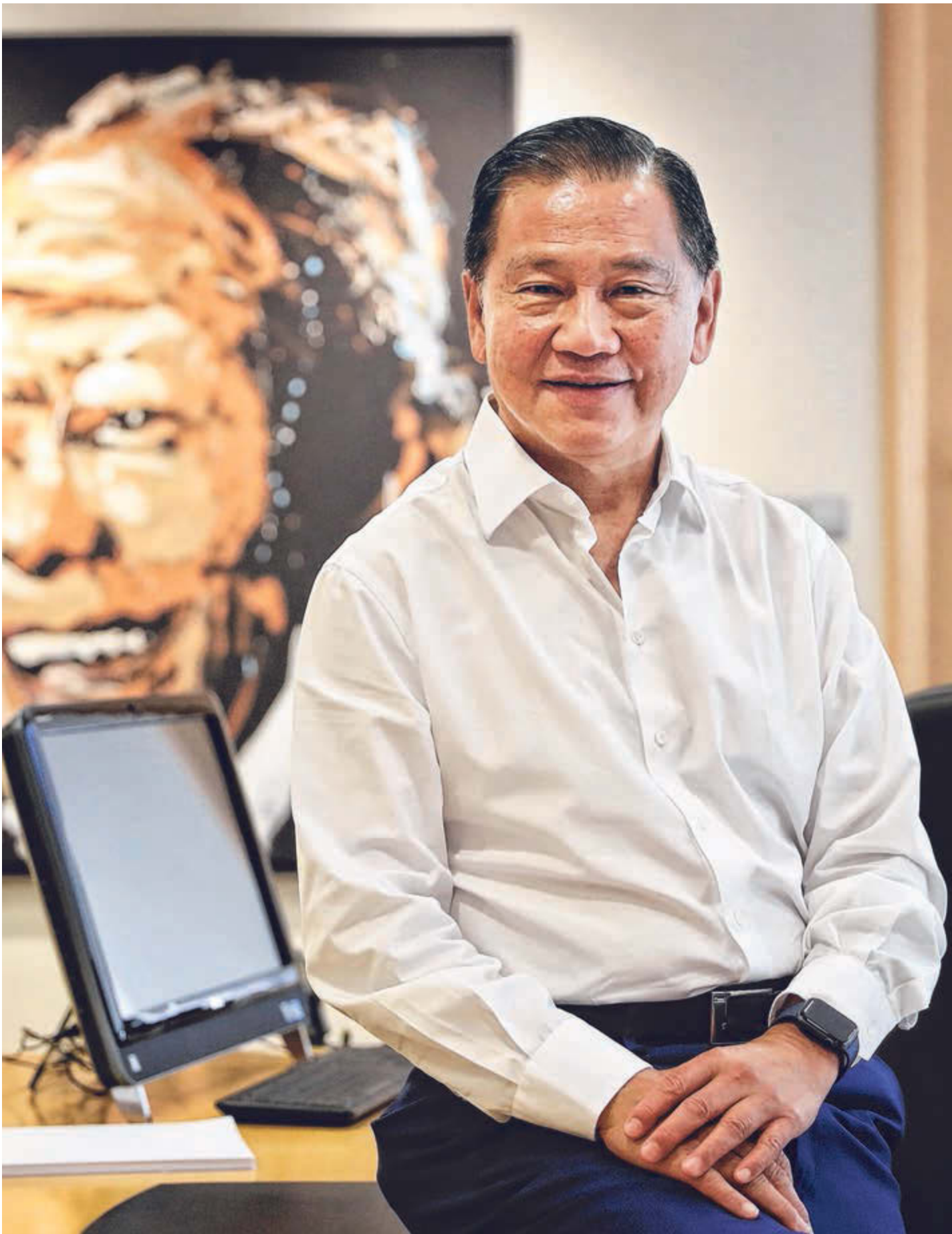
When his requests for an electric typewriter and a vehicle to transport his staff to lunch (Changi then was remote and undeveloped) were not approved, he listed their provision as requirements for contractors bidding for tenders.

"We were paying for the contracts and the typewriter and vehicle were not owned by us. The contractors owned them and took them back when they were done," he says with a grin.

In many ways, he says his career has been a case of opportunity and chance. "How many engineers get the opportunity to build airports? They get to build schools, hospitals and shopping malls. But airports?"

After more than two decades in the public sector, including a stint at the Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research, he took up the offer to steer engineering and construction firm L&M Investments.

He shook things up, doubled its share price and then left to become president of Pidemco Land in 1996. Four years later, when CapitaLand was born from a merger between Pidemco Land and DBS Land, he be-



Mr Liew Mun Leong at his office in Changi Airport. In the background is a portrait of Singapore's founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, painted by French artist Jean-Pierre Blanchard. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM



Left: Mr Liew being conferred the French Legion of Honour in Paris in 2017, which honoured his personal achievements and contribution to France's economy. Right: Mr Liew (third from right) at the launch of real estate investment trust CapitaMall Trust's listing in 2002. PHOTOS: COURTESY OF LIEW MUN LEONG



came its head honcho.

Those were turbulent times. "CapitaLand went through a whole series of crises: the burst of the dot.com bubble, 9/11, the Bali bombings, Sars... For five or six years, it was one crisis after another," he says.

"It was tense and frightening. During one meeting with my people, I nearly cried. I said: 'It can't be that our share price has gone below \$1. You're all clever people. What's happening?'"

"It was a rallying call and we had to pull together and fight. I'm proud of the fact that none of us had real estate in our blood. We were engineers and economists, but we were good thinkers and operators," says Mr Liew.

The company more than pulled through.

For several years after that, net profit for CapitaLand – the first to introduce real estate investment trusts (Reits) to the local market in 2001 – was more than \$1 billion.

Working with good people is something he emphasises repeatedly. "My philosophy has always been to hire whoever is better than

me. If not, I wouldn't have come so far," he says, adding that he personally picks every member of his management bench.

Good staff and support from shareholders allow him to exercise what is crucial: courageous leadership. He made several bold moves. In 2010, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, CapitaLand bought seven properties in China for \$2.2 billion from Orient Overseas International, controlled by the family of former Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa.

CapitaLand started with a group market cap of \$8.9 billion.

"When I stepped down in 2013, it was \$44.5 billion," he says. "It means we created \$35 billion over 12 years."

Mr Liew also believes in rewarding good staff and stretching a hand to help them if they need it.

"You must ask this question: Why should people follow you? Do you have a future?"

Once, he asked his accountant to do a headcount of the number of staff who had become millionaires on paper because of CapitaLand's share price and options. "Six hun-

dred; I'm very proud of that," he says.

However, over his 12 years at CapitaLand, he has also fired seven chief executives. "I handled them personally, I didn't leave it to my HR. I told them they might have a better future elsewhere. If you are frank and have no malice, I believe nobody will hold a grudge against you."

Leadership and talent development are topics he addresses often in lengthy e-mails he writes on Sundays to staff, a practice he started 20 years ago.

The Straits Times Press recently compiled and published Sunday Em@ils From A Chairman, comprising nearly 30 of these messages written between 2016 and 2018. The book is the fifth of his Sunday Em@ils series.

The topics run the gamut from Changi Airport to hawkers food to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Mr Liew, who once harboured journalistic ambitions, says: "With one press of the button, I can send my thoughts and reflections to my staff. Because it's in writing, I can express myself clearly."

He averages about 20 e-mails a year, each of which can take up to five hours to write.

"While some of my staff say thank you, I'm sure not all read them because they can be quite long-winded," says the corporate leader who delivers lectures – pro bono – to entrepreneurs, engineers and other professionals at NUS.

He has also heard at least one staff member in Australia finding it a waste of time.

"But it doesn't stop me. I do it on Sundays and am not using office time. I'm actually amazed I've done it for so long. If my e-mails were a son, he'd be doing his national service now," adds Mr Liew, who is

now working on a book about his experience in the private and public sectors.

His proudest achievement remains Changi Airport, which handles more than 65 million passengers annually and has won more than 500 awards.

He built its first runway in 1975, and now, he's beaver away over T5, which is bigger than T1, T2 and T3 combined, and is slated to open around 2030. The terminals, he says, are like his children.

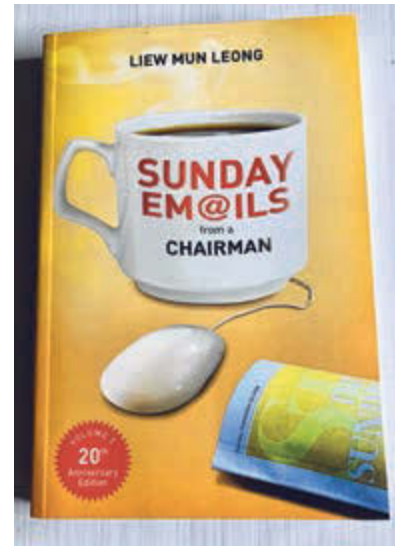
"Every child is delivered on time, brought up well and has brains."

kimhoh@sph.com.sg

Overcoming the fear of failure

SCAN TO WATCH

<http://str.sg/liewmunleong>



Sunday Em@ils From A Chairman, published by Straits Times Press, is priced at \$29.90 and available at all major bookstores. Royalties from the sale of the book will be donated to Temasek Foundation Nurtures to support programmes on education and professional development.

Drug abusers: Rehab v long-term imprisonment

Why focus on rehab is the way ahead

Changes to the law make distinction between addiction as an illness and as a crime, say experts, adding that long jail terms are not effective deterrent



Tan Tam Mei

The changes to the Misuse of Drugs Act send a signal that rehabilitation, rather than punishment, is the way to tackle the problem of drug abusers.

But a balance must be struck between viewing drug abuse as an illness and as a crime, say experts.

Addiction is the final stage when drug abuse moves from the realm of "fun" to "illness", says sociologist Stella Quah, an adjunct professor at the Duke-NUS Medical School, adding that it can cause serious damage to a person's brain and body.

The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill expands more rehabilitative measures to those whose sole crime is to consume drugs. The particular law was last amended in 2012.

Instead of long-term imprisonment (LT) for those caught more than twice, the new approach allows them to enter drug rehabilitation centres (DRCs) instead. These changes were approved in Parliament on Jan 15. While it is clear that drug abuse remains a crime, as seen in the introduction of mandatory minimum sentences for certain offences, ramping up rehabilitative efforts is the first step towards tackling the root of this addiction, say experts.

"Throwing the law at them isn't going to make them walk away from drugs," says criminal lawyer Daniel Xu.

"If treating drug addiction as an illness prevents them from reoffending, what is wrong with calling them patients?"

Still, while all 16 MPs who spoke during the parliamentary debate supported the changes, some like Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar (Ang Mo Kio GRC) asked for assurance that it did not mean Singapore was going soft on drug abuse and related crimes.

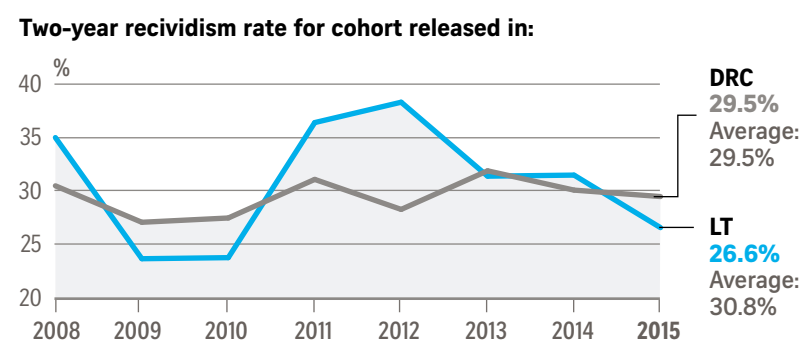
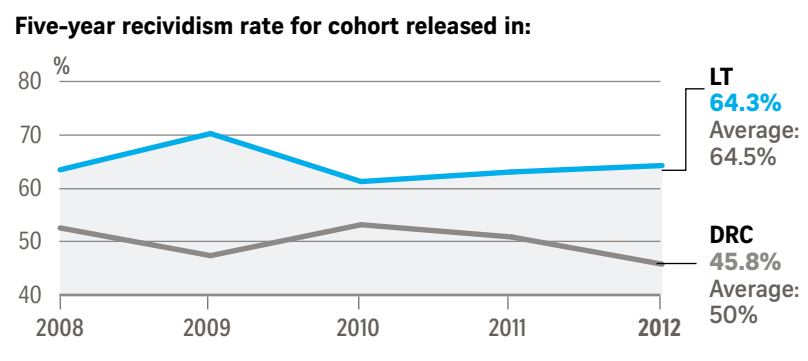
However, Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam noted during the debate that the new measures would draw a distinction between pure abusers and those who face other criminal charges.



Inmates in the drug rehabilitation centre within Changi Prison Complex. Under changes to the law, the maximum length of DRC will be increased to four years, up from three years. ST FILE PHOTO

The case for rehabilitation

The five-year recidivism rate for LT inmates remains "very high", says Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam. This means that within five years of release, on average, six out of 10 LT inmates will be back in prison.



Source: SINGAPORE PRISON SERVICE SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

In making the case for the shift to rehabilitation, he also cited evidence showing that long periods of detention affect an abuser's ability to integrate back into society.

BEYOND PUNISHMENT

Mr Shanmugam explained to Parliament: "Our assessment is that for pure abusers, we can now afford to shift the balance quite decisively and focus more on rehabilitation as opposed to detention." Besides expanding the DRC route to pure abusers, the availability of the option also hinges on the abuser admitting to his drug charges, notes criminologist Olivia Choy from Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

She says: "It's very specific to just a group of individuals who actively seek treatment, so it could be the case that they are also more motivated to change."

The move could channel over half of potential LT inmates to the rehabilitation regime, said Mr Shanmugam.

Previously, only first- or second-time abusers were sent to DRCs. Recalcitrant abusers caught for the third time or more, or those with other offences like drug trafficking, were given long-term sentences of at least five years' jail and three strokes of the cane.

The two-year recidivism rate –

which is the rate of reoffending – for DRC and LT inmates stood at a yearly average of 29.5 per cent and 30.8 per cent, respectively, for cohorts released from 2008 to 2015, according to Singapore Prison Service statistics.

However, the five-year recidivism rate for LT inmates hit a yearly average of 64.5 per cent for cohorts released from 2008 to 2012.

This is higher than the average recidivism rate of 50 per cent for DRC inmates over the same period.

While the two-year recidivism rate for LT inmates is "encouraging", said Mr Shanmugam, the five-year rate remains "very high".

This means that within five years of their release, six in 10 long-term inmates are back in prison.

BIOLOGICAL FACTORS

Duke-NUS' Prof Quah lauds the "important" change to the law that makes a distinction between addiction as an illness and as criminal behaviour, pointing out: "A person diagnosed with drug addiction needs treatment and rehabilitation."

However, the move to tackle drug dependency instead of punishing the individual is just the start, adds NTU's Assistant Professor Choy, saying: "The previous policy to deal with drug abusers seemed to emphasise severe punishment. But studies have shown that severity is the least important aspect in deterring drug use."

In fact, it is factors such as swiftness of punishment and the certainty of it that play a greater part in deterrence, she adds.

International research on addiction has also shown that systematic rehabilitation approaches, such as medical therapy and counselling, are more effective than incarceration, adds Prof Quah.

Addiction also causes significant changes to the brain, says veteran psychiatrist Munidasa Winslow. And similar to how the sick receive treatment, addicts, too, need a commitment to a programme and medication to stay clean, he adds.

Increasingly, research has started to acknowledge that in addition to social and environmental processes that might lead an individual to drug use, biological factors could also indicate one's propensity to engage in drug use, says Prof Choy.

"If you think of it that way, we are thinking of offending as a public health problem."

However, she also cautioned against absolving the offender of his crime. "Rehabilitation is just a different form of punishment," she says.

Inmates in DRC are still detained. Under the changes, the maximum length of DRC will be increased to four years, up from three years.

There will be a longer maximum supervision period for DRC inmates post-release, up from two years to five.

During the parliamentary debate, Mr Shanmugam addressed the argument that characterised drug addiction as a brain disease tied to changes in brain structure and function, and that drug abuse was "beyond people's control".

While there is scope for the Government to look at such research, he said, "we will look at evidence and manage our policies accordingly".

Said Mr Shanmugam: "At the same time, we also have to believe in individual responsibility until evidence shows us otherwise."

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Tough law came amid rise in abusers

Long-term imprisonment came into law in 1998 to curb growing number of hardcore addicts who turned to crime to feed their habit



Zaihan Mohamed Yusof

The man who was deputy director of the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) in the early years of the 1990s, Mr Masbollah Fazal, recalls that his agency took a two-pronged strategy to tackling drug misuse.

That was: To hit drug syndicates hard by arresting masterminds and working down the chain to detain traffickers; and to arrest addicts and send them to drug rehabilitation centres (DRCs).

There, the addicts would undergo rehabilitation and receive counselling, says Mr Masbollah, now 78.

In the early days after the CNB was set up in 1971, there was no approach targeted at hardcore drug addicts, who would often be sent to DRCs. But Singapore's drug scene began to change for the worse.

After the CNB was established and after Operation Ferret, a massive operation in 1977 to clamp down on drug abuse, 26,000 abusers had been arrested by Feb 1978, said Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam in Parliament in 2017.

By the 1990s, the authorities were arresting between 6,000 and 7,000 people a year for drug offences, he added.

While heroin and cannabis were still the drugs of choice, by 1996, a new threat was on the horizon – party drugs like Ecstasy and the more lethal Ice, also known as methamphetamine.

From no arrests of Ecstasy abusers in 1995, the following year, there were 661 Ecstasy or E-abusers nabbed, along with 39,000 E tablets seized. In 1997, that rose to about 55,000 E pills.

As for rehabilitation of those caught, in 1990 the number of people in DRCs was 5,350. By 1994, it was 8,700, then Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng said in 1995.

Further cause for concern: The proportion of hardcore addicts in drug rehabilitation centres was rising – going from 65 per cent in 1994 to 71 per cent in 1997.

"Something had to be done," says Mr Masbollah, who left the CNB in

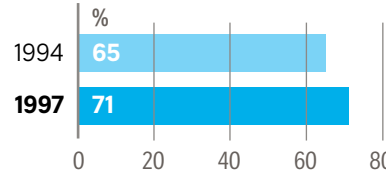


Inmates exercising at a drug rehabilitation centre in Upper Changi Road North. In 1990 the number of people in DRCs was 5,350. By 1994, it was 8,700, then Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng said in 1995. ST PHOTOS: ALPHONSUS CHERN

The case for long-term imprisonment

Before long-term imprisonment (LT) came around in 1998, then Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng had highlighted the increasing proportion of hardcore addicts that were in the Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC)

Proportion of hardcore drug abusers* in DRC population



* A hardcore drug abuser is someone who has been to DRC or prison for a drug offence more than twice.

Source: SINGAPORE PRISON SERVICE SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

1996 after a six-year stint.

"We needed stronger legislation to reduce the number of drug abusers. Otherwise, the numbers (will) just keep on rising."

TAKING A TOUGHER APPROACH

These factors saw a switch of emphasis to long-term imprisonment (LT), which came into law in 1998 as the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill, enhancing the Misuse of Drugs Act of 1973.



Inmates taking classes at the DRC in Upper Changi Road North. Previously, only first- or second-time drug abusers were sent to DRCs.

Under the change, hardcore drug abusers who entered a DRC or prison on a drug offence more than twice would serve longer sentences and get caning.

This meant an offender who was caught a third time for consuming drugs would serve a minimum of five years' jail and be caned at least three strokes. Previously, he could serve repeat sentences in a DRC with a maximum of three years.

In 1998, Mr Wong told Parliament that hardcore addicts should not be treated as victims, as many turned to crime to feed their drug habit.

"More than 73 per cent of hardcore drug addicts have some form of criminal record, while about 76 per cent of all addicts with criminal records are hardcore addicts," he said. "So, they are criminals also."

The LT sentence was intended to take drug addicts "out of circulation" in order to protect the public

and ensure abusers did not "contaminate" the innocent, said Mr Wong. It was also intended to deter continued drug addiction and punish recalcitrant abusers.

During the debate on the Bill, then Potong Pasir MP Chiam See Tong accused the Government of resorting to "strong-arm" tactics, saying consuming heroin was a social problem and not a crime in some countries.

"The fact that the Government has to escalate the punishment from non-corporal to corporal ones for repeat drug offenders shows that the Government's treatment and rehabilitation programmes for drug addicts over the last 20 years have probably not been successful," Mr Chiam had said.

Then Nominated MP Claire Chiang called for a Bill that was not only a "tough love" policy, but also one that showed compassion.

She said: "Everyone I have talked to supported the Bill, in particular, enhanced penalties on Ice and Ecstasy traffickers. It was on the basis of balancing compassion with pragmatic efficacy that drug prevention advocates, therapists and ex-addicts themselves came to accept long jail sentences and caning as effective deterrents to drug offence."

Yet, veteran psychiatrist Munidasa Winslow, who had witnessed the drug situation in the 1990s, tells Insight that treatment options for drug addiction were not yet developed.

Still, there was a need to remove the vulnerable from the threats, says former senior minister of state Zainul Abidin Rasheed, who was involved in community outreach programmes targeting drug abusers and their families. "The pressures (drug addicts faced) outside were real, putting them inside was a good move."

However, there were drawbacks when father figures or breadwinners were imprisoned, he adds. Children and wives of drug offenders were left in the lurch.

But community leaders acknowledged the problem and rallied behind the late Harun Ghani, the Ministry of Home Affairs' political secretary, who worked hard on initiatives to tackle the problem, says former MP Othman Haron Eusoff.

"There was some success, especially in helping the members of families of those involved in drugs to cope with the difficulties they faced," he adds.

In DRCs and prisons, offenders were given opportunities to learn about discipline, religion and regaining their self-esteem and self-confidence.

On whether DRC stints are helpful for hardcore addicts, front-line officer Masbollah says: "Unless they are determined to make the decision to stop (taking drugs) with the support of counselling, then hardcore addicts will not succeed."

Some observers thus welcome the fact that despite the shift in focus on rehabilitation, LT punishment remains in place for abusers who do not confess to their addiction, and those who are also convicted of criminal offences.

Lawyer Daniel Xu said rehabilitation is only one of the four limbs in the sentencing process.

"While rehabilitation might be higher on the agenda now, there is still the need to fulfil the other three principles of retribution, deterrence, prevention. Hence, LT is still relevant for those who do not fit into the specific criteria to be sent to DRC," he says.

"It is a delicate balancing act."

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Ex-drug users give their take

The road to recovery can be long and arduous, especially for hardcore drug abusers.

In interviews with Insight, former drug abusers share their views on the effectiveness of the drug rehabilitation centre (DRC) and long-term imprisonment (LT) pathways.

A common thread is the daily struggle to stay clean.

For self-confessed hardcore drug addict Bruce Mathieu, his LT sentence of five years allowed him to witness how other drug offenders on long-term sentences easily lose hope.

Says Mr Mathieu, 49, who spent

more than 20 years in prison for drug-related and other crimes: "I have seen countless wives leave their husbands who were in prison."

"When drug addicts come out, they turn back to drugs because there's no family, there's nobody. They give up hope because people close to them give up hope on them."

Mr Mathieu was released in 2016 and now works at The Caffeine Experience, a social enterprise that hires former offenders.

Having experienced both DRC and LT approaches, Mr Mathieu believes strongly in early interven-

tion, which he found in the DRC. "A longer prison sentence doesn't serve as a deterrent," he says.

"Instead, it hardens an inmate so much it doesn't help him."

In his experience, by the time the rehabilitation phase in an LT sentence comes in – usually towards the end – it may be too late.

He explains that nearing the end of the sentence, LT inmates are less likely to respond to counselling as their minds are "already outside, thinking of the food I want to eat or drugs I want to score".

Mr Mathieu, who first took heroin at 15, says that even today, the craving for drugs is still there. "What it does is it remains dormant in me, just like a volcano waiting for the day to erupt."

His motivation to stay clean stems from family support and his personal promise to be a good father to his daughter.

But without a goal or something to look forward to, other inmates may not be so lucky, he adds.

Before LT was implemented in 1998, former drug abuser David

Chong, 55, had already done six DRC stints spanning a total of eight years.

And when LT came onto the scene, Mr Chong, now a cleaner, racked up a total of 16 years' jail with 18 strokes of the cane over the course of two stints.

When he was released in 2014, he thought he would stay on the straight and narrow, but the very night he regained his freedom, he got high.

"As soon as I had some money, my mind went to drugs immediately," he says, adding that this was despite family support.

While Mr Chong, who has been clean since 2015, supports the shift to rehabilitation as it gives drug addicts who are truly repentant a chance to change, there will be those who exploit the loopholes.

"They will think 'heng' (lucky in Hokkien) I got a lighter sentence, and fall back to their old ways," he says, citing himself as an example of how multiple DRC and LT stints did nothing for his resolve.

He believes that abusers can walk away from old habits only

when they have other things to live for. For him, it is his Christian faith.

Those whom Insight spoke to also raised questions about the number of times a pure abuser can be sent to DRC.

Former deputy director of the Central Narcotics Bureau, Mr Masbollah Fazal, 78, says: "There must be limits. If not, people who say they will repent and change will not do it. Once you become a frequent visitor to the DRC, it doesn't benefit the person and family."

Former drug abusers also expressed scepticism at the new rule to give lighter sentences to drug abusers who surrender to the authorities.

Mr Alvin Chiong, 50, a former drug abuser turned counsellor, says: "Unless there's family pressure, the majority of drug addicts will not surrender."

"When you're on drugs, your mindset is totally selfish and you will not want to give in."

Tan Tam Mei and Zaihan Mohamed Yusof

Mr Bruce Mathieu is a former drug offender who now works at The Caffeine Experience, a social enterprise that hires ex-offenders. A tattoo on his left forearm has his daughter's name, Beatrice, on it. It serves as a reminder to him to stay clean, as he has promised to be a good father to her.

ST PHOTO: ZAIHAN MOHAMED YUSOF



LONG JAIL TERMS DON'T HELP

A longer prison sentence doesn't serve as a deterrent. Instead, it hardens an inmate so much it doesn't help them.



MR BRUCE MATHIEU, a self-confessed hardcore drug addict, on how drug offenders on long-term sentences easily lose hope.

SELFISH MINDSET

When you're on drugs, your mindset is totally selfish and you will not want to give in.



MR ALVIN CHIONG, a former drug abuser turned counsellor, who believes most drug addicts will not surrender unless there is family pressure, despite the lighter sentences.



Ruby Kate Chitsey of Arkansas in the US started a project and Facebook page called “Three Wishes for Ruby’s Residents” to do simple things to bring joy to nursing home residents. Over the last two months, she has raised over US\$72,000 (S\$97,000) to pay for what she described as “things that make life sweeter”. PHOTO: FACEBOOK/THREE WISHES FOR RUBY’S RESIDENTS

What’s Trending

Nursing home residents’ wishes come true – thanks to US girl

And guess who gets to crack the world’s most popular egg



Ong Hwee Hwee

Digital Editor

“If I could bring you three things in the whole world, what would those be?”

One wanted trousers that fit. Another asked for a haircut. A third person wanted fresh fruit because she had not had a fresh strawberry in five years.

These were simple yet unfulfilled wishes of nursing home residents in Arkansas in the United States.

A young girl faithfully jotted down these requests in her notebook, and decided to make the wishes come true.

Ruby Kate Chitsey, 11, started a project and Facebook page called “Three Wishes for Ruby’s Residents” after hearing how much an elderly resident longed to see her dog but could not afford to pay a pet sitter to take the dog to visit her.

The woman lives in a nursing home the girl’s mother, who is a nurse, works for. Ruby Kate, who often goes with her mum to work, learnt about this after striking up a conversation with the resident.

“It was very sad. We have a lot of dogs and I could feel her pain,” Ruby Kate told CNN last week.

The encounter prompted her to ask other nursing home residents for their wish lists.

She would visit the home two or three times a week to take down requests and deliver the goodies.

“They weren’t new cars or a million dollars. They were very simple things that you could just go to Walmart and get – and that’s what we do,” she said.

Her mother, Ms Amanda Milford Chitsey, 46, helped her set up a GoFundMe account to pay for

these wishes, which included books, candy bars and food from outside the nursing home.

Over the last two months, Ruby Kate has raised over US\$72,000 (S\$97,000) – almost hitting her target of US\$75,000 – to pay for what she described as “things that make life sweeter”.

GoFundMe took notice of her campaign and named her “Kid Hero” of the month.

Her mother said residents found it easier to open up to a child.

She told BBC News last

Thursday: “I have been working in this field for 25 years, and you get used to caring for people’s medical needs, but you can forget about the need for joy. It took a child to see that it’s not okay.”

She added: “I have known one resident for 18 years. He asked for some pants that fit him properly. It broke me that I hadn’t realised.”

While the project was launched with a simple goal in mind, it has cast the spotlight on the wider issue of the funding gap.

The elderly from the lower-income group living in US nursing homes rely on Medicaid. They get room and board and medical care – but just US\$40 in cash a month for anything extra.

Ruby Kate has since expanded her project to five nursing homes. Said Facebook user Lindsay Hunter-Parker: “Thank you, Ruby, for showing so much kindness to these sweet people.”

“So many people forget about the elderly... You are reminding us all that they are here and they deserve our time.”

WHO CRACKED THE MOST POPULAR EGG ON EARTH?

You would have heard about it, scoffed at it or even cracked jokes about it.

Yes, we are talking about the World Record Egg – the most popular egg on earth.

An image of the egg that was posted on Instagram last month has since attracted 51.9 million likes, beating social media star Kylie Jenner, who got 18 million likes for the announcement of her daughter’s birth.

And the egg – the name is Eugene if you want to be polite – is back in the news.

Yesterday, it emerged that US video-streaming service Hulu won the race to “crack” the egg – and the golden opportunity to leverage its 9.7 million-strong following.

An image of football laces on the egg shell was posted on its Instagram account with the message: “The wait is over. All will be revealed this Sunday following the Super Bowl. Watch it first, only on @hulu.”

ONLY ONLINE

The week’s top 3 picks at straitstimes.com



VIDEO: Huat a happy CNY

People from all walks of life send their best wishes this Chinese New Year. Huat ah! str.sg/CNYhuat

VIDEO: Paw patrol

Meet the dogs of Certis K-9, the first auxiliary police K-9 unit in Singapore. str.sg/certisk9

VIDEO: Hangout with ST

Topics include the HIV Registry data leak and the shaming of Asian food on reality show The Bachelor. str.sg/hangout49

NOTABLE TRENDS

GOJEK: A video of a female passenger accusing a Gojek driver of kidnapping her went viral.

The woman was reportedly upset that the driver could not avoid Electronic Road Pricing gantries. She asked to alight but the driver said no because they were on an expressway.

#HUAWEI: The United States has charged the Chinese telecommunications giant and its chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou, with stealing trade secrets from a US competitor and defrauding banks to evade sanctions on Iran.

THE BACHELOR: Contestants of the US dating show were slammed for shaming Asian food after they openly mocked dishes like pig intestine, which they tried while filming in Singapore.

It was not immediately known how much Hulu, which is pushing its live sports subscription, paid.

Industry insiders had speculated that the deal could be worth as much as US\$10 million – more than a Super Bowl advertisement. But marketing site Campaign US quoted sources as saying that the actual figure “was nowhere near this high”.

The announcement followed a series of images posted over the last two weeks showing the egg slowly cracking. These images were seen as part of a marketing campaign to keep followers guessing who would be the first brand to pay to “crack” the egg.

Before Hulu, there had been reports of other attempts to broker a deal.

On Thursday, The Atlantic reported that Need to Impeach, an organisation advocating the impeachment of US President Donald Trump, was approached by a viral marketing agency to take the spot. The proposal reportedly involved the egg cracking to reveal the words “Impeach Trump” as the US leader popped out and did the chicken dance. It wasn’t enough to egg on Need to Impeach.

While the Hulu deal has been sealed, it remains a mystery who would be pocketing the money.

It is still unclear who hatched the egg idea, though British news site The Independent ran an interview with the egg’s Instagram account holder, who claimed to be based in London.

“I thought it would be an interesting experiment to try and beat the record with something as basic as possible,” said the account holder. “I just thought it would be funny if something as simple as an egg could take the crown.”

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#OpinionOfTheDay

Celebrating family, not Chinese-ness, in the new year



Toh Wen Li

One of the first works of English literature I studied in secondary school was a poem about Chinese New Year.

Festival by Singapore poet Kenneth Wee explores the generation gap between members of a family during the Spring Festival.

The young people in the poem ditch Chinese deities for Western idols Schwarzenegger and Stallone. They recoil from traditional food. “Spring couplets” are quotations from Shakespeare.

These juxtapositions seem too easy, too “cardboard”, but the last stanza has stuck with me over the years:

“We watch the organised festivities/And are reminded of our culture, our roots/And we think: “I’m proud to be Chinese,/In English.”

Like the narrator, I have always felt more at home speaking and thinking in English, even though I was weaned on a diet of Taiwanese cartoons and dramas.

When I feel guilty about not being Chinese enough – for example, when I lapse into English while talking about Chinese culture – these lines spring to mind.

But lately, I’ve been wondering: What’s so bad about feeling proud to be Chinese while thinking in English? The two aren’t incompatible. Shouldn’t we accept these little ironies – English, after all, is one of the official languages of Singapore – rather than lament the loss of tradition?

With Chinese New Year round the corner, I find myself more preoccupied with these thoughts than usual. What, I wonder, does the Spring Festival mean to me as a Chinese person in Singapore?

In my family, Chinese New Year often passes in a kind of sugar-induced haze as we move from house to house with oranges and red packets, going through the same rituals and conversations again and again.

For the most part, I like it.

But for many of my peers, the festival feels, at best, like a chore, and, at its worst, alienating. First, there is the pageantry of it all. Some of my peers grimace at the sound of lion dancers, or the cheesy “dong dong qiang” music in shopping centres.

Then of course there is that one “auntie” who asks her relatives all sorts of awkward questions: Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend? When are you getting married? How much do you earn?

While these are usually ways of showing concern, the questions can backfire if the person they are speaking to has lost his job, done badly in school, is struggling to conceive, or for whatever reason doesn’t conform to conventional notions of success.

So what does Chinese New Year mean to me? I see it as a time for the family to come together, not necessarily a celebration of our Chinese-ness. My cousins and I speak to one another in English, but venture wobbly attempts at Hokkien – with a stunted vocabulary that covers a limited range of topics such as food, work and other mundane affairs – while chatting with our grandparents.

Others share the same sentiment. One friend tells me she finds these gatherings all the more important these days because she is at that point in life where the only other time you meet the extended family would be at funerals. It’s nice to be able to get together for something festive for a change.

Last year, the China Daily newspaper reported that English-language couplets had become a “new and stylish” way for young Chinese people to celebrate the Spring Festival, with dozens of shops on e-commerce platform Taobao selling prints of such couplets – traditionally, poetic lines in Chinese expressing hope and happiness for the coming year. At the same time, it meant that non-Chinese speakers would be able to understand them.

A typical set of these couplets on Taobao reads: “Eat well, sleep well, have fun day by day” and “Study good, work good, make money more and more.”

What an abomination.

Or, some people might say, it’s a way to make the festival more open and inclusive.

Rituals and traditions are important, but in the case of Chinese New Year, what matters even more is the spirit of the festival – a time of togetherness, and being able to spend time with the people you care about.

I’m reminded of last year’s Chinese New Year, when my family, exhausted after a day of house-hopping, settled for a quiet dinner at Delifrance instead of more traditional Chinese fare. Still, it was wonderful.

Here’s to a Chinese New Year where everyone – the “unsuccessful”, the unmarried, the elderly folk and the prodigal sons and daughters – feels included, valued and a part of the family.

Now, that’s something worth celebrating.

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Mr Glen de Vries, president and co-founder of Medidata Solutions, says Medidata is a technology company, but it is a life sciences company first. About a quarter of the company's revenue gets invested back into developing new products, and the majority of the world's top-selling drugs were developed on the Medidata platform. ST PHOTO: SAHIBA CHAUDHARY

InGoodCompany

Medidata's de Vries eyes bullet-drugs era

The firm has grown as a dominant provider of Web-based data solutions for clinical trials



Ravi Velloor

Associate Editor

Maybe, it was all in the genes. When Glen de Vries was growing up in New York, his big dream was to be a scientist. As a child, he wanted to be a physicist. As he grew older, that turned to wanting to be a chemist and, by the time he was in university, the computer nerd had decided that to be a biologist was to be his calling. That's what he was in 1995 when he was in Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Centre in New York and realised he had to go to another part of the hospital to get information about the outcomes of patients whose blood he had been testing. Sitting across him through most of the working day was a

medical resident named Ed Ikeguchi, who was helping pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer and Takeda work with patients. Like him, Dr Ikeguchi was a computer enthusiast. "It was a time when the Internet was just starting to become a thing and we'd say, 'Oh, wouldn't all this research be so much better and faster if we could use this thing called the Web'," says Mr de Vries, now 46 years old. That serendipity led to a company called OceanTek, which developed Web applications for conducting clinical trials, the pair working on these ideas in their spare time. Watching the two, an older colleague at Columbia-Presbyterian advised them it was obvious that, while they knew plenty of science, they had no clue about money or how a business was run. Former roommate Tarek Sherif was just the sort of person they needed; he'd been working in a family office and was investing in technology companies, and had been an early investor in Quintiles, which became IQVIA, the big global research outsourcing firm. And that's how Medidata got its birth in 1999. "It was basically born in my fifth-floor walk-up apartment in Murray Hills between 35th Street and Lexington," reminisces Mr de Vries, whose mother had built up her own public relations company before eventually selling it to the Interpublic Group, a streak of entrepreneurship she probably had passed to her son. "Tarek ended up leaving the family office he was working with. We wound up putting his desk chair across the desk from me because there was nowhere to sit and, 20 years later, we literally sit in the same office still. From never having met him 20 years ago, it has got to

the point that we built this business together. He is my best friend and we spend our days together." From that shaky start, Medidata has steadily emerged as a dominant provider of Web-based data management solutions for clinical trials. Its principal goal is to streamline the process of collecting, verifying and consolidating research data. Medidata seeks to be in the front line of research, with products that give investigators, monitors and data managers the best visibility into data, thus speeding up decision-making and better science. Its thousand-plus customers and partners worldwide include pharmaceutical, biotech and medical-device companies, as well as academic researchers. Broadly fitting into the category of companies that offer "software as a service", it is thriving testimony that you do not have to be in Silicon Valley to be taken seriously as a software company. Medidata reported third-quarter 2018 revenue of US\$163.4 million (\$\$221 million), an 18 per cent increase from the comparable period in 2017, setting it on course to meet annual billings of US\$1 billion by 2021. Solidly profitable, about a quarter of the revenue gets invested back into developing new products, says Mr de Vries. The majority of the world's top-selling drugs were developed on the Medidata platform. Medical research, with all its pressures to show results, is one area where the temptation to fudge things in order to show progress frequently arises. Mr de Vries says he had his own terrifying moment of temptation, one from which he jolted himself awake just like the time he once stood on the verge of calamity when driving from New

York to Pittsburgh and momentarily fell asleep at the wheel. The moment happened back in his days at Columbia. Before the young researcher were pages and pages of paper where he had been scoring tests on a better way of using molecular techniques to figure out how much a patient's prostate cancer had advanced, and whether he was a good candidate for surgery. Back in the early 1990s when removing the prostate was supposed to be a cure, he says, bone scans were often used to judge whether the surgery had been a success and the tumour contained. But, five years later, the patient might still end up with metastatic prostate cancer because the lab had missed prostates and tiny metastases that imaging had not detected. Mr de Vries had been trying to detect the potential for those circulating cancer cells using a molecular asset. "There I was with my list of plus and minus," he recalls. "I was looking for circulating prostate cells in these people's blood and then I would look into surgical outcomes. It was a very qualitative test and somewhat subjective. I was like: 'Oh, this thing that I scored is a minus, maybe there is a little band there and I should change that to a plus.'" Mr de Vries says he became instantly aware that to enter a faulty reading for the sake of convenience could have been the beginning of a road that goes to very bad ethical places. "That moment became my touchstone in research and business. That was my 'falling asleep at the wheel' moment". I am terrified of that moment – almost taking a step in the wrong direction – and my guiding principle is that you just can't have any leeway (when it comes to science)."

Medidata is coming into its own as an intermediary between processes and connectivity at a key moment in the history of medical research. First is the rapid advance of connectivity and digitisation – a ring on his hand tells him the quality of his sleep the previous night and his current heartbeat. When you make your annual or half-yearly trip to the doctor, the amount of objective, quantitative data he has available to assess your health is simply incredible. Second, as Roy Vagelos, the former chairman of Merck and one of the fathers of modern life sciences, pointed out, humankind is standing on the shoulders of more than four decades of molecular biology research. Having more efficient research projects means that we're spending less time and less money to get new therapies into the hands of waiting patients. A lot of this is a result of the war on cancer declared by the late United States president Richard Nixon which spawned the beginning of this era of researching the molecular pathways that lead to disease, says Mr de Vries. "While much of that data is still used that way, we've also learnt so much about the underlying molecular nature of all diseases. So, what we have now is a world where you're developing a new therapy that treats not merely the symptoms but also the physiology or the biochemistry of the patient. "You are literally treating the things that are going wrong within a cell or in a nucleus where people's DNA is being turned into layers and layers and layers that lead to our health," he says. "The biological nature of treatments is getting much more sophisticated than before. You take the digital and the biological – the intersection of technology and medical innovation – and that is where Medidata sits." One of the most exciting things that's happening in cancer research right now is immuno-oncology. Simply put, it's creating drugs that train your immune system to fight the cancer, instead of giving people chemotherapy, which, in simple terms is rather like poisoning the whole body in the hope of killing the cancer. Immuno-oncology gets the body to fight off the cancer. The result of all these is new kinds of therapies, including perhaps the most exciting of all – precision medicine with all its attendant implications, including how drug companies adjust to the prospect of smaller, fewer doses of drugs to treat disease. "In the world of life sciences, drug companies, biotech companies and device companies – the more specific the medicine is, the smaller the target market," he says. "The more specific the therapy, the harder it is to find patients who would benefit from it. There is this need to rethink the world of not just the research part of life sciences, but the whole product management cycle in life sciences. That's the second dimension to Medidata. I think we can be in a place that enables that next generation of life sciences thinking. That's a very exciting world to be in, for me personally." While science remains the priority, business, guided by the sure hand of Mr Sharif, isn't doing badly either, with its last reported quarterly Ebitda (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation) well over US\$20 million. Mr de Vries says Medidata, which went public in 2009 – at the height of the global financial crisis – wasn't one of those start-ups that believed in "burning cash". While it is on target to achieve its guidance of US\$1 billion revenue in 2021, the management's focus is on how life sciences is poised to work so differently, he says. "We put a quarter of our revenue back into R&D and that's pretty extraordinary – not in a self-congratulatory way – but it shows we're still a founder-led company that really wants to be a part of that next state in life sciences, data and technology. We are a technology company, but we are a life sciences company first." Does he worry about his own health? "It is not so much worry, but it matters to me," says Mr de Vries. "If I exercise, sleep enough, eat healthy food and don't drink too much alcohol, my heart rate will be much lower at about 50 beats per minute."

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Fast facts

THE FOUNDER

Mr Glen de Vries, 46, is the president and co-founder of Medidata Solutions. His father was a stockbroker, and his mother, a public relations specialist. Mr de Vries received his under-

graduate degree in molecular biology and genetics from Carnegie Mellon University, worked as a research scientist at the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Centre and studied computer science at New York University's Courant Institute of Mathematics. His publications have appeared

in Applied Clinical Trials, Cancer, The Journal of Urology, Molecular Diagnostics, Stat, Urologic Clinics of North America and TechCrunch. He is a trustee of Carnegie Mellon University, a Columbia HITLAB fellow and a member of the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association European Advisory Board.

THE COMPANY

Medidata Solutions is a "software as a service" cloud-based company that serves the medical research industry in clinical development, commercial and real-world data. It has 2,500 employees and serves more than 1,000 customers and partners worldwide.

Founded in 1999, Medidata is based in New York City, with additional offices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, China, South Korea and Singapore. Total revenue for the third quarter of last year – the most recent result – was US\$163.4 million (\$\$221 million), an increase of 18

per cent over the US\$139 million in the third quarter of 2017. The company has a market capitalisation of US\$4.3 billion. Great Place To Work and Fortune named Medidata one of the 2019 Best Workplaces in Technology, placing it 25th among large companies.

The clerk, the officer and the surgeon

Raffles is feted as S'pore's founder, but Farquhar and Crawford helped shaped the port city

Graham Berry

Raffles, Farquhar and Crawford: three names linked inextricably with the founding of modern Singapore in 1819.

They could not have been more different individuals. Raffles, vain, glorious and driven to seek fame; Farquhar, a self-effacing, pragmatic soldier and administrator; and Crawford, a physician, writer and diplomat with a reputation for parsimony.

Within a period of seven years from 1819 to 1826, they each contributed their unique skills to the creation of a modern trading entrepôt echoing the use of strategic and topographical advantages which had been recognised from the 7th to the 16th centuries by empires whose powers were based on controlling the sea trade throughout the Southeast Asian archipelago.

Born within 10 years of one another in the last quarter of the 18th century, what bound these three unlikely characters together was their employment as servants of the East India Company (EIC), founded in 1600 to exploit the wealth of the East.

Armed with monopolies to protect and develop their interests and reinforced by a private army and navy, the EIC grew to become an aggressive builder of empire which by the early 1800s, as William Dalrymple wrote in *The Guardian* on 4 March 2015, came "close to generat-

ing nearly half of Britain's trade" and "had trained up a private security force of around 260,000 – twice the size of the British army – and marshalled more firepower than any nation state in Asia".

The rapid growth of almost unfettered power for a relatively small number of individuals led in due course to the EIC becoming "synonymous with ostentatious wealth and political corruption" and whose possessions and interests would ultimately pass into the control of the British Crown.

William Farquhar was an officer cadet enlisted in the EIC, Crawford was initially engaged as a surgeon; and Raffles, at the age of 14, started work in the EIC headquarters in Leadenhall Street in London as a clerk.

It was Penang that drew these three men together. Raffles, in rapid promotion, was posted to Penang in 1805 as an Assistant Secretary. Crawford was posted to

Penang in 1808 and Farquhar, who served as Resident of Malacca from 1803, had frequent dealings with the EIC administration based in Penang.

These tenuous connections became firmer in 1811, when the invasion of Java against the French and Dutch was sanctioned by the Governor-General of India, Lord Minto. All three took part in the invasion.

The invasion was successful and Raffles remained as Lieutenant Governor of Java for a short period before returning to England. Crawford was appointed Resident at Yogyakarta whilst Farquhar returned to his residency at Malacca. Following his return from England in 1818, Raffles was appointed Governor of the south of Singapore was once again under the influence of the Dutch, which contributed to Singapore being the choice for the new EIC base. Although Raffles, as the senior officer present, has been credited, it is not clear that the idea was his alone. The local knowledge of Farquhar and Captain Daniel Ross of the ship *Discovery* certainly



Stamford Raffles laid down broad principles, plans and priorities for Singapore but he was largely absent. PHOTO: NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON

would have been influential.

Farquhar and Raffles landed in Singapore on 29 January 1819. Treaties were signed for an area of land sufficient for the EIC to ply its trade; neither sovereignty, nor permanent cession over people or property, was granted. Raffles left Singapore the day after a treaty was signed on 6 February, leaving Farquhar in charge of the nascent EIC "factory".

Farquhar was born in rural Aberdeenshire, Scotland, in February 1774. He enlisted in the Madras Artillery of the EIC at the age of 17 and by 1811 he had risen to the rank of major and was formally appointed Resident of Malacca in 1813. Farquhar was a success in Malacca. His astute stewardship was recognised when he was appointed as the Resident of Singapore. He was an ideal

candidate to develop the new settlement.

Raffles had laid down a number of broad principles, plans and priorities for the new port but he was largely absent as he was based in Bencoolen. It was left to Farquhar to take decisions, and those he made improved the facilities needed for the new port, established a harbour, organised defence and provided infrastructure for roads and bridges and housing for the merchants and traders. Farquhar assiduously created the circumstances to allow the new port to thrive, and by 1820, a mere 12 months after he landed, the revenues of the port were meeting the cost of administration and, within three years of its founding, in 1822, it had overtaken the trade of Penang.

As Ernest C.T. Chew points out in



William Farquhar improved port facilities, established a harbour, organised defence and provided infrastructure. PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

his essay "The Foundation of a British Settlement", "certainly it was Farquhar who worked alongside the Malay authorities for the next four years to secure the survival and growth of the British Settlement on Singapore Island". However, Raffles' respect for Farquhar and his abilities was tested by many of the practical day-to-day choices he had to make, some of which were contrary to Raffles' vision.

Land for merchants, tax income on gambling and his acceptance of local traditions on the use of slaves were particularly contentious. The previously cordial relationship quickly soured.

In June 1819 Raffles wrote to the Governor-General of India expressing his view that "the exertions of Major Farquhar during my short absence have been indefatigable – the

country has assumed a new appearance, in spite of the evidence, as the senior officer in the region, Raffles' views were accepted by the EIC and plans were made to replace Farquhar.

New, separate Malaysian and Singapore dollars came into being in June 1967. To prudently manage the transition, the currencies were held at parity but interchangeability came to an end during 1973. This coincided with the winding up of the sterling area in London and Malaysia's and Singapore's currencies now tracked the US dollar rather than the UK pound. Singapore had already heavily diversified its reserves out of sterling anticipating a devaluation of the pound (which did indeed eventuate in November 1967).

From the end of the 1960s, British shipping lines were faced with two new unwelcome national lines in the Far East Freight Conference. By 1978, Singapore possessed the second-largest merchant fleet in Asia.

There was a short tit-for-tat trade war after the 9 August split in which high tariffs were temporarily slapped on various goods crossing the Causeway. Nevertheless, there was a general desire on both sides not to cut off noses to spite faces.

Exchange control administered by banks in Singapore on Malaysia's exports was clearly no longer acceptable for Kuala Lumpur. But the British agency houses, which still owned and managed much of Malaysia's plantation sector, were reassured by Bank Negara officials in 1968 that liberal exchange controls meant for the foreseeable future that much of the rubber, palm oil, timber and pineapples of the southern half of the peninsula would continue to be processed in and exported from Singapore.

So, even if a common market was



John Crawford succeeded in negotiating the rights to the entire island, together with adjacent seas, straits and islets. PHOTO: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE

took part in the invasion of Java in 1811 and was thereafter appointed Resident of Yogyakarta where he studied Malay and Javanese culture and language.

As a respected scholar and diplomat, he undertook a number of diplomatic missions to Southeast Asia before being called to succeed his fellow Scot, Farquhar, as Resident of Singapore in 1823.

Crawford inherited a burgeoning colony where Farquhar had laid the groundwork for development and expansion. He arrived in Singapore on 9 June 1823 and on that day Raffles departed Singapore for the last time. Crawford wasted no time in taking a strategic view by spending time and money on further reclamation of the Singapore River. He was critical of the early treaties negotiated by Raffles and once more, tak-

ing a long-term view, he set out to extend the original treaty made solely for routine EIC trading. He understood that the future development of Singapore lay in securing sovereignty over the entire territory.

The Governor-General of India concurred and by August 1824, Crawford had succeeded in negotiating the rights to the entire island together with adjacent seas, straits and islets. This solved at a stroke many of the major issues facing the still new settlement, including the contentious questions of land tenure, slavery and gambling which had caused such animosity between Raffles and Farquhar. It provided a strong foundation for protection and development of the already significant achievements.

Chew, in an essay in 2002, points out that Raffles himself had initially backed Crawford's appointment, however, in common with his views on Farquhar, that opinion changed to misgivings about his approach, and in January 1824, he wrote to his sister in Singapore: "I am sorry Crawford does not give so much satisfaction as I could have wished, and that he is not superior to the influence of personal feelings in his public administration. I never placed much confidence in his judgment or experience."

In light of the obvious success of Crawford's diplomatic skills and the continued progress of the settlement, largely due to his introduction of a regulatory framework and application of free trade principles and a tariff-free port, Raffles' judgment of the Resident's abilities was not supported by the facts and was similar to his flawed assessment of Farquhar.

Crawford left his post in 1826 when he was sent on a mission to Burma. On his eventual return to the United Kingdom he continued his scholarly writings on Southeast Asia. Although Crawford was only the second Resident of Singapore he was also the last. From 1826, Penang, Malacca and Singapore were governed jointly as the Straits Settlements by a single governor.

Crawford died in London at the age of 85 in 1868. Raffles experienced much tragedy in his personal life – his first wife died and he was predeceased by four of his five children; he died in London in 1826, just one day short of his 45th birthday. Farquhar returned to the city of Perth in his native Scotland, married and led a quiet and retired life until his death in May 1839.

Raffles was the senior EIC official when the company established its small "factory" in Singapore in 1819. The initial town plans conformed to his vision of the settlement and as the senior officer it was his reports to the directors of the EIC that prevailed in matters of dispute.

Raffles' lasting contribution to Singapore lies in his design and lay-out of the early city. His colonial ap-

proach to division of the races has, two centuries later, serenely bequeathed the vibrancy of Little India and the charms and colour of Kampong Glam and Chinatown.

The hagiography written by his second wife Sophia has contributed to the creation of a brand that is now difficult to eradicate from Singapore. The name Raffles has become associated with quality and prestige and as Tim Hännigan related in Raffles and the British Invasion of Java, "Raffles remains like a rash all over Singapore, his name immortalised in schools, hotels and hospitals".

Time has looked favourably on those of superior rank, but greater consideration should be given to those who interpreted the broad plans, shed the blood, sweat and tears to put them into practice and dealt with the consequences of their actions. Raffles' long absences and lack of involvement in much of the essential decision-making in establishing the settlement do not justify the adulation for his name that prevails in Singapore. His deliberate debasement of Farquhar and Crawford's achievements does him no credit and gives insight into his true character.

Crawford is recognised in the naming of a major road and bridge, albeit with the alternative orthography of Crawford; Farquhar by contrast has no lasting memorial to his name in Singapore. In his home of Perth, his epitaph records his achievements and notes that in addition to his military duties he "served as Resident of Malacca and afterwards at Singapore which latter settlement he founded".

It is convenient to have a single individual on which to build a founding myth and narrative, particularly with a name that slips easily off the tongue.

One of names and founders is confusing; however, without Farquhar's practical and indefatigable energy, drive and expertise in kick-starting the whole venture and Crawford's long-sighted strategic overview backed by his diplomatic skills, Singapore is unlikely to have developed so rapidly and successfully.

Raffles' vision could not have been achieved without men of grit and determination equal to those of the founders of modern Singapore in 1965. The bicentennial in 2019 is a good time to set the record straight and to acknowledge Farquhar's contributions to early Singapore in an appropriate way.

◆ Dr Graham Berry is author of *From Kilts To Sarongs: Scottish Pioneers Of Singapore* and *200 Years of Singapore*. Born in Edinburgh, he was the CEO of the Scottish Arts Council until 2007, when he moved to Singapore. While in Singapore, he served on several boards, including the Port of Singapore Authority, the Leadership, St Luke's ElderCare, and The Glasgow School of Art Singapore. In 2016, he returned to Scotland.

Britain's role in Singapore's exit from Malaysia

Nicholas J. White

A MOMENT OF ANGUISH

On 9 August 1965 Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister of Singapore, famously shed tears on national television when he announced that his micro-state had exited from Malaysia. Lee lamented that for "the whole of my adult life... I have believed in merger and the unity of these two territories... (of) people connected by geography, economics and ties of kinship".

British politicians, diplomats, journalists and businessmen were equally anguished. As historian Tony Stockwell has written: "For the British government, Malaysia's raison d'être lay in the merger of island and peninsula, their separation in 1965 made a nonsense of the original 'grand design'."

Lord Antony Head, Britain's High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, attempted to dissuade the Malaysian Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, from complete separation. That followed on from an earlier British official intervention in February 1965 as fears of a complete breakup were expressed when Tunku's plans for a constitutional tinkering to create a looser federation leaked out.

But Head's efforts in August were in vain and the fact that the High Commissioner only became aware (accidentally) of the split on the evening of 8 August underlined the loss of British influence in Southeast Asia.

This confirmed that local political actors were at the forefront of both the making and the unmaking of "Greater Malaysia" (and not British "neocolonialists" as Presi-

dent Sukarno of Indonesia claimed).

Reflective of the growing Asia-Pacific political and economic ties of Singapore and Malaysia, Australian diplomats had more of a heads-up than their British counterparts. Canberra's High Commissioner wrote home in mid-July 1965 that "an attempt to discard Singapore is becoming increasingly probable".

Harold Wilson, Britain's Prime Minister, was likewise caught unawares. Wilson revealed in his memoirs published in 1971 that he had to break his summer holiday in the Scilly Isles and fly back to the United Kingdom mainland for emergency talks, given the "great anxiety in Whitehall".

British-backed Malaysia was in the midst of Confrontation with Indonesia involving a massive deployment of over 60,000 UK service personnel, 200 aircraft and 80 naval vessels. "Very strong messages", recalled Wilson, were sent to both Tunku and Lee "to avoid any action that could lead to an outbreak of hostilities" or "internal subversion".

Given that Singapore was still Britain's largest overseas base, discussions commenced on the future of the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement which had been a central element, as far as the British were concerned, in the formation of Malaysia in the first place.

In the wake of the split, the London-based Economist magazine reported that the old fears in expatriate circles about Lee's radicalism and Singapore's vulnerability in an unstable region resurfaced. The government seemed poised to take a lurch to the left and establish closer relations with communist

China and/or Sukarno's Indonesia (which itself was falling under Mao Zedong's spell). Lee denounced United States policy in Vietnam and also allowed the Singapore branch of the Bank of China – banned during the Malaysia years – to reopen.

Sir John Nicholson, head of Liverpool's Blue Funnel Line, the leading British shipping group in Southeast Asia with a controlling interest in Singapore's Straits Steamship Company (SSCo), was still down in the dumps in October 1965. Nicholson expected independent Singapore to trade increasingly with the communist bloc. In both Singapore and Malaysia, "gradual impoverishment" was predicted "through deferment of foreign capital projects which depend on a local common market, also duplication of services, and fiscal competition".

Anti-British sentiment was likely to accompany this, and as such "our entanglement with SSCo will prove embarrassing and I am now trying to fatten it for tossing off the sleigh at the right moment".

What had brought about this apparently disastrous situation, defying, it would seem, all economic, political and geographical logic?

CAUSES OF THE SPLIT

Back in February 1964, Blue Funnel's executives had predicted a very different scenario in which Lee Kuan Yew would become the next prime minister of Malaysia. But therein lay the rub.

Lee's decision to join the opposition and campaign on a pan-Malayan ticket to unseat the ruling Alliance coalition, dominated by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), proved a key

cause of separation. By April 1965, Lee was calling for a multiracial "Malaysian Malaysia". The UMNO-led by Syed Jafar Albar were incensed, and even called for Lee's arrest. The ultras insisted on the Malay social and political privileges enjoyed on mainland Malaysia extended to the whole of Malaysia.

But UMNO's leadership, it could be argued, was equally uncompromising. In September 1963, the UK's Commissioner General for South-east Asia, Lord Selkirk, presidingly opined to Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that senior Malay politicians were "prone to look at Malaysia as being no more than an extension of Malaya" and Malays generally had "great difficulty in handling sensibly and with understanding other Asian races".

By June 1965, there were rumours in British circles of a potential coup against Lee's government in Singapore (and Harold Wilson cautioned Tunku that "such action was totally opposed to all we believed in as a Commonwealth").

The People's Action Party (PAP) government in Singapore and the Alliance regime in Kuala Lumpur collaborated, with somewhat reluctant British acquiescence, in the round-up of the island's radical left during 1963 in Operation Coldstore.

But, once the so-called "communist undertow" was dealt with, inter-communal tensions became more and more apparent, epitomised by the Singapore riots of July 1964. Lee and other PAP leaders finally signed the exit agreement on 7 August, following warnings from Kuala Lumpur that even more severe racial strife was imminent.

The ethnic emphasis, however,

tends to obscure the ideological differences. The PAP offered "the democratic socialist way to a more equal and just society" (or state-led capitalism as it turned out) whereas Tunku and his Minister of Finance, Tan Siev Sin, were convinced free marketeers. Personality clashes didn't help – Lee's serious and austere leadership contrasted with the gambling and golfing Tunku.

Nor should we overlook the economic tensions in Kuala Lumpur-Singapore relations (as a commercial attache in the UK High Commission in Singapore shrewdly reflected in September 1965).

A common market, stimulating Singapore's industrialisation and, hence, providing plenty of employment for the island's burgeoning population, was the prime attraction of "Mighty Malaysia" for PAP leaders. But this failed to materialise, largely because the politicians and technocrats in Kuala Lumpur feared Singapore's financial and commercial domination of the peninsula in repetition of the colonial era.

The hard-fought negotiations on the economic terms of the merger in which, for example, Singapore had to surrender 40 per cent of its revenues from taxes to the central exchequer in Kuala Lumpur and lost control of pioneer industry decisions, suggested that it was going to be a rocky road ahead.

As economic historian Greg Huff has counter-factually postulated, Singapore was probably better off out of Malaysia than in.

CONSEQUENCES

British companies, which continued to dominate the commanding heights of the Malaysian and Singa-

Malaysia

porean economies in the 1960s, shared similar views to Lee Kuan Yew on the economic advantages of political integration.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the British banks and agency houses which operated in both territories lobbied hard for some form of economic union to survive political separation after August 1965.

But nationalism prevailed. Officials at Bank Negara, Malaysia's central bank, were highly critical of those British enterprises which wished to see minimal change in commercial and financial relations.

As a novice MP, Mahathir Mohamad (the notoriously Anglo-sceptic Prime Minister of Malaysia after 1981) lambasted such attitudes in a speech in the Malaysian Parliament in October 1966. "History and politics" could no longer be "moulded" to suit the interests of the British import-export houses, declared Mahathir. As "an independent sovereign nation", Malaysia could not "always be thinking of the convenience of Guthrie's, Harrisons and Crosfield, Borneo Company etc".

The Malaysian government, Mahathir was sure, would no longer tolerate economic "manipulation" from outside. The continuation of a common currency between Malaysia and Singapore would work to the disadvantage of Malaysia since "money made in Malaysia will be spent in Singapore to give jobs, build houses and generally develop the Republic".

Advocacy of a continued currency union smacked of "a servile colonial past" in which "our colonial masters wanted the city of comforts of Singapore and designed everything for this". Such pipe dreams Mahathir could "excuse"

on the part of the British or the Singaporeans "but I cannot accept this of Malaysians".

New, separate Malaysian and Singapore dollars came into being in June 1967. To prudently manage the transition, the currencies were held at parity but interchangeability came to an end during 1973. This coincided with the winding up of the sterling area in London and Malaysia's and Singapore's currencies now tracked the US dollar rather than the UK pound. Singapore had already heavily diversified its reserves out of sterling anticipating a devaluation of the pound (which did indeed eventuate in November 1967).

From the end of the 1960s, British shipping lines were faced with two new unwelcome national lines in the Far East Freight Conference. By 1978, Singapore possessed the second-largest merchant fleet in Asia.

There was a short tit-for-tat trade war after the 9 August split in which high tariffs were temporarily slapped on various goods crossing the Causeway. Nevertheless, there was a general desire on both sides not to cut off noses to spite faces.

Exchange control administered by banks in Singapore on Malaysia's exports was clearly no longer acceptable for Kuala Lumpur. But the British agency houses, which still owned and managed much of Malaysia's plantation sector, were reassured by Bank Negara officials in 1968 that liberal exchange controls meant for the foreseeable future that much of the rubber, palm oil, timber and pineapples of the southern half of the peninsula would continue to be processed in and exported from Singapore.

So, even if a common market was



Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Deputy Prime Minister Toh Chin Chye at the press conference on the Separation of Singapore and Malaysia in 1965. ST FILE PHOTO

impossible, a high degree of interdependence between island and peninsula remained well into the 1970s. That said, in the upgrading of Port Klang in West Malaysia and the encouragement of export-oriented industrialisation, targeted at Western outlets and not the Malaysian market, both states were clearly trying to be as economically independent of each other as possible.

Despite these inconveniences, Britons were soon singing the praises of separate Singapore. In an article in Blue Funnel's staff magazine in July 1968 entitled *The Charm Of Singapore*, the island nation was lauded.

The PAP government was said to be "virtually unique"; it was "demo-

cratically elected and so popular that there is no opposition except for a very small minority of communist agitators"; Europeans, Malays, Chinese and Indians were (apparently) all "enthusiastic supporter(s)" of their government, which was in "no way a dictatorship". "Racial differences" lay beneath the surface, but the article stressed that:

"All Singaporeans have one thing in common; a pride in their Island Nation. We will succeed, we will be a lighthouse in the world is the firm belief of the people. They are hard-working, commonly-skilled and well-educated. They are used to the highest average standard of living in south-east Asia."

Rose-tinted expatriate visions notwithstanding, Lee Kuan Yew would be deeply disappointed not only by Britain's accelerated post-Confrontation military withdrawal east of Suez from January 1968 but also by a lack of British capital for Singapore's new industries.

In March 1967, Lee expounded to Britain's Commonwealth Secretary, Herbert Bowden, how Singapore provided the "perfect haven" from which British business "could attack the whole Far Eastern market" and could become a "safer commercial base for Britain than... Hong Kong". Lee also reminded Bowden that Singapore was "the best country" and "he had now got the unions firmly under control".

◆ Nicholas J. White is professor of imperial and Commonwealth history at Liverpool John Moores University and co-director of Liverpool's Centre for Port & Maritime History. His research interests focus upon the history of decolonisation (particularly in relation to Singapore and Hong Kong) and international business history (especially ocean-going shipping).



These are excerpts from a book titled *200 Years of Singapore and the United Kingdom*, edited by Tommy Koh and Scott Wightman. It is available at leading bookstores and at www.stbooks.sg. It retails for \$35.



Hawker culture is alive and thriving in Singapore, and the very voraciousness of the debate on the future of hawker centres attests to that, notes the writer. As for Singapore's bid to put its hawker culture up for inclusion on Unesco's intangible cultural heritage list, having it inscribed successfully on the list will strengthen national and community resolve to preserve, protect and enhance this heritage, she says. PHOTO: NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

Put hawkers first in the #OurHawkerCulture debate

For artisanal food at affordable prices, go for an operating model that lets hawkers have secure rental



Chua Mui Hoong

Opinion Editor

Every now and then, I get a craving for fish dumpling.

I used to satisfy it at the famous Song Kee fishball noodle shop at Upper Serangoon, but stopped going there when a new management took over. I've tried the so-called original stall at Toa Payoh and a franchisee outlet at Upper Thomson. They are fine to dull the ache.

But when fish dumpling craving flares into a raging itch, I head to the Block 127 Lorong 1 Toa Payoh market, stall #02-01 (right beside the famous mini-pau stall).

The Chinese signboard says Lao Shen Shredded Chicken Noodle, but actually, Mr Sim's forte are his handmade fishballs and fish dumplings, or *her kiao* in Teochew.

The stall opens from about 7am till about 1pm or 2pm when stocks run out. When the customers have left, husband and wife lay out the *huang zi her* (yellowtail fish) and start the painstaking work of scraping fish flesh from sinew and bone to make fishball and dumpling. The fish skin is handrolled; the fish meat mixed with various ingredients including *tee poh* (dried sole fish bone), a must-have in every self-respecting Teochew fish dish, and the concoction shaped into neat parcels of delight. The skin is soft yet springy; but it is the fish meat taste I love best – a mix of fish and

savoury and spice, subtle and rich at the same time.

Each fishball and dumpling is hand crafted. If this is not artisanal, I don't know what is.

A bowl of noodles with some shredded chicken and fishballs costs \$3; with fish dumplings it is \$4; and for \$5 you get both fishball and fish dumpling. I usually go for the \$5 option and add two extra fish dumplings at \$1 per pop, bringing my fish dumpling noodle indulgence to \$7 each time.

He always warns me – it's \$7, okay? – and I always say Yes and nod happily.

This morning, I engaged him and his wife in a chat as they came over to our table.

Why not make more *her kiao* for sale without noodles, I ask.

Mr Sim, 60, who says everybody calls him Ah Liang, shows me his hands, bleached from daily use. "I only have this pair of hands. It makes hundreds of fishball and fish dumplings a day."

Hiring workers has proven difficult, and both their children, now grown up, have no interest in learning the trade. In a few years' time, my favourite *her kiao* stall will probably go the way of my once-favourite yong tau fu shop (Mosque Street) and my once-favourite bak chor mee stall (Sin Ming coffee shop) and fade into the ether.

The hawker trade was a boon for people of Mr Sim's generation, providing a means of livelihood that let them raise families. He took over the trade from his father. But it is facing problems of renewal, as many ageing hawkers hang up their wok, tawa (roti prata pan) or Apollo oven (for roast duck), with no successors to pass their culinary knowledge, skills and trade to.

In the case of Mr Sim, he is willing to sell the recipe to someone interested to take over. He will help train them to perfect the art of making *her kiao*. Do I know anyone who might be interested, he asks, and I said I would link him up with National Environment Agency (NEA) officials. (And write about him in the English newspaper.)

The future of hawker culture has drawn much public discussion and angst over the past year.

This in part came after news that Singapore would put up its hawker culture for inclusion on Unesco's intangible cultural heritage list. The target is for hawker culture to be inscribed onto the list in 2020 – requiring Singapore to put up a dossier on this by next month.

The lead agency doing this is the National Heritage Board, working closely with NEA. I am on the 14-member nominating committee to oversee this effort.

I feel a propriety interest in hawker culture and the whole hawker debate, because my late parents were first-generation hawkers given a cheap licence to operate a cooked-food stall. They were itinerant hawkers who used to "chao ti gu" – run away from hawker department inspectors – who were eventually relocated to a built hawker centre.

The Labrador Villa Hawker Centre (now gone) off Alexandra Road became my pre- and after-school care centre, as my siblings and I spent most of our time there out of school. We saw first-hand the long hours and hard work that went into the hawker trade. We all grew up learning to pluck *tow gay* (bean sprouts) and shell cockles; I learnt to *char kway teow* to my own taste (charred, with a little bit of chilli, Penang style).

As my parents aged, my father asked the three of us if we might be interested to take over the stall. First-generation licence holders can pass on their subsidised licence privilege to their offspring. We said No unanimously. So the licence went back to NEA. Exit one *char kway teow* seller.

In the past year, many Singaporeans have been concerned about the future of hawker heritage.

First is the question of whether there are young people stepping up to become hawkers, who can hone their craft.

Second is the commercial viability of the centres: What is the future of hawker centres? Does NEA intend to outsource their management to some kind of social enterprise operator or can it continue running them as it has for decades?

Why take steps to inscribe a cultural heritage that is at risk of fading away, many have asked.

I see things differently. Hawker culture is alive and thriving in Singapore. The very voraciousness of the debate on the future of hawker centres attests to that.

As for the Unesco nomination, having hawker culture inscribed successfully on the Unesco list will strengthen national and community resolve to preserve, protect and enhance this heritage. Nothing can focus the Government's mind more than regular reports to an international committee on progress on this front. Domestically, such an inscription will instil pride among hawkers and among Singaporeans, increasing the appeal of hawker culture and thus increasing the chances that this particular way of Singaporean life will thrive.

On how NEA intends to grapple with the issue of managing hawker centres – a question I have raised

with officials privately – my sense is that this is not at all cast in stone.

While NEA has experimented with having seven out of 114 hawker centres run by social enterprises, it has not decided on how to manage the existing other centres and new centres that may be built.

Food blogger K.F. Seetoh did a public service in exposing the layers of costs – dishwashing, marketing and management – and penalties that some of these not very socially conscionable enterprises imposed on hawkers. NEA has stepped in to stop some more onerous terms. It has to continue to beef up its scrutiny of hawker centre operations, especially if the Unesco attempt is successful. Managing a bunch of ageing hawker centres might have been viewed as bothersome; when they are elevated into symbols of a nation's cultural heritage, it becomes imperative to put more thought and resources into how to do this better.

When a policy hasn't been decided, there is scope for public views and experts to weigh in.

When it comes to hawker culture, there are some conflicting objectives. People want their hawker food to be handmade, locally produced fare (in other words, artisanal) but want to pay low prices for such fare; but hawkers need to make a good living to sustain the trade.

Cheap rental can help keep food prices low – but should the state subsidise hawker centre rental and by how much? It might be easier to make an argument that hawker centre rental should be priced lower than market norms, if there is a stronger public interest to be made, such as the need to preserve and enhance a national heritage. Add to this the way hawker centres deliver affordable cooked food to the masses, and the way they fuel organic communities as regular patrons and stallholders form friendships.

FROM THE MOUTHS OF HAWKERS

The missing ingredient in the hawker debate has sometimes seemed to be hawkers themselves. What do they think of the move to inscribe their way of life into the Unesco registry?

To find out, I sat in one afternoon last month at a dialogue with hawkers. This was part of NEA's engagement of hawkers. To date, it has conducted 120 engagement sessions at 93 hawker centres reaching over 4,200 hawkers. The session I observed (as a member of the nominating committee) included two groups of hawkers – one speaking in English and the other in Mandarin – giving views on hawker culture and its

Managing a bunch of ageing hawker centres might be viewed as bothersome; when they are elevated as symbols of a nation's cultural heritage, it becomes imperative to put more thought and resources into how to do this better.

After observing the hawker centre debate, I am convinced the best way to preserve and enhance hawker culture is to go back to basics. This means putting the hawker at the centre of hawker culture – coming up with hawker centre operations that put hawkers first; designing policies to enhance the trade to make it attractive for young people to take up the trade; and giving hawkers, who are micro-entrepreneurs, room to experiment and innovate.

sustainability, among other issues.

These folks had taken a valuable weekday afternoon off to troop to Bishan Community Club for a two-hour dialogue. When the Unesco bid was explained to them, there was a palpable sense of pride that their trade was being considered for such inscription, and happy talk about how people are now so interested in the work of hawkers.

Fortuitously, my neighbourhood chicken rice seller was at the dialogue. He recognised me when I sat in a corner eavesdropping. After the dialogue, he introduced me proudly to the others as someone who had "grown up eating my chicken rice" (*chi dao da*) to which I affirmed that, indeed, my family members could frequent his stall as often as three times a week, as his chicken rice was fragrant yet amazingly not too oily. What I did not know was that Uncle Leong wasn't just the neighbourhood chicken rice seller; he was a Hawker Mentor who spent his time teaching and training young people in the art of making chicken rice. At least one of his mentees went on to open his own chicken rice stall.

I also met the Hawker Towkay, Mr Lim Gek Meng, the boss of the Ming Fa fishball noodle stall in Chinatown. Mr Lim's son took over the business and has opened a chain of fishball and minced pork noodle stalls across Singapore.

Again, fortuitously, I know one of them well – Meng Kitchen in Upper Thomson Road. It was another family favourite – one member went for 5am breakfast; I might go at 10am on Sundays; and my niece would head there for supper at 1am with her millennial friends. It was a thrill to boast to them that I had met the father of the boss of Meng Kitchen!

I also chatted with Mr Law Teng Hwa, 59, who came back to Singapore after working overseas for many years, to take over the family's Teochew kueh stall at Tiong Bahru market. He is an avid learner and had signed up for courses in Hangzhou and Kuala Lumpur to learn about e-commerce. He intends to bring these ideas into the family kueh stall. He sent me an image of a witty poster in the shape of a png kueh (rice kueh) and the slogan – The Best Kueh no one Teochew about. I can see it going viral already.

After observing the hawker centre debate, I am convinced the best way to preserve and enhance hawker culture is to go back to basics. This means putting the hawker at the centre of hawker culture – coming up with hawker centre operations that put hawkers first; designing policies to make it attractive for young people to take up the trade; and giving hawkers, who are micro-entrepreneurs, room to experiment and innovate.

It means setting rental rates that are predictable and allow new entrants time to hone their craft; while allowing seasoned hawkers a chance to increase their earnings with hard work and good food that earn them a loyal clientele.

Amid all the noise and angst, putting hawkers first can be a clarifying way out of this messy debate.

muihoong@sph.com.sg

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OBITUARIES

*The legacy that you leave behind when you left this Earth,
is the many hearts you have touched and the many lives you have shaped.
You would be dearly missed along life's way, quietly remembered every day.
No longer in our lives to share, but in our hearts, you're always there.*



TAN KIM SENG (1937 – 2019)

Our beloved Kim Seng, husband, father, grandfather, uncle, teacher, coach and friend to so many of us, passed away peacefully on 29 Jan 2019.
A private funeral ceremony was conducted on 31 Jan 2019.

Wife: Chew Kim Hua Hazel

Son: Jeremy Tan

Daughter-in-law: Min Zhu

Daughter: Jasmine Tan

Son-in-law: John Lim

Granddaughters:

Clara Eve Tan
Janelle Lim
Janessa Lim
Jermaine Lim

Our family wishes to express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to relatives, friends and ex-students/athletes for their attendance, condolences, donations, wreaths, and kind assistance during our recent bereavement.
Words cannot adequately express our sincere gratitude.



KOH SHUEH CHEE

Age: 83

passed away peacefully on 1 February 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.
Wife: Tan Siang Ngin

Son:
Henry Koh Yiak Sian

Daughter-in-law:
Sim Woan Min

Daughters:
Koh Pat Tian
Jocelyn Koh Pat Po
Julie Koh Pat Joo
Patsy Koh

Sons-in-law:
Eric Lim Ser Hiong
Vendy Lie
Seah Choon Meng
Lee Kit Choong

Grandsons:
Koh Jin Tong
Koh Jin Peng
Koh Jin Hao
Lim Wei Zhi
Brian Lie Wei Siong
Seah Jin Ho
Lee Yu Zhe

Granddaughters:
Lim Wei Qi
Lim Wei Hui
Jessica Lie Jia Lin
Sandy Seah Jin San
Lee Yu Qing
Lee Yu Yan

All relatives and friends.

Wake is held at Blk 652 Hougang Ave 8, S'pore 530652.
Cortege will leave on Monday, 4 February 2019
at 8am for Mandai Crematorium Hall 2
for cremation at 9am.

With Deepest Sympathy & Heartfelt
Condolences to the Family of the Late



Mr Chua Ong Teng, Patrick
Departed on 2 February 2019

From



The Commissioner
& Staff of the
Singapore Police Force



Mdm Sellaiyah Punniavathi

Age: 60

Passed away peacefully on 1 February 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Husband: Suppiah Ponniah (Ex Power Grid)

Daughter: Logasewathi Suppiah

Son: Saravana Suppiah

Brother: Chelliah Raveendran

In-laws, nephews, nieces, all relatives and friends.

Dearest Wife & Loving Mother is resting at
Block 517D Jurong West Street 52 #04-583,
Singapore 644517. Tel: 9382 7014 / 9182 3221

Cortege leaves on Sunday 3 February 2019 at 5.00pm
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1 for cremation at 6.30pm.



Gwee Chin Hian Reggie

Age: 61

Was called home to be with the Lord
on 2 February 2019, dearly missed
and remembered by loved ones.

Father: Gwee Teck Kin (deceased)

Mother: Gladys Wee Sai Choo

And all relatives and friends.

Wake at Block 118 Jalan Membina,
Singapore 160118.

Night service on Sunday
3 February 2019 at 8.00pm.

Cortege leaves on Monday
4 February 2019 at 1.45pm
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1
for cremation at 2.45pm.



Arumugam s/o Murukayyan

Age: 77

Passed away peacefully on
2 February 2019, dearly missed
and remembered by loved ones.

Appa is resting at Block 852
Woodlands Street 83 #06-242,
Singapore 730852.

Cortege leaves on Monday
4 February 2019 at 3.15pm
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1
for cremation at 4.15pm.

Memory wanders
as shadows fall
Back to the days
of happiness,
Days beyond recall.
A vision comes before us,
So calm, so dear,
so sweet,
Of her lips now silent
And whose lids are
closed in sleep.

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Invest



Me & My Money

Real estate executive Wendeline Goh bought her first private apartment when she was just 26.
B12

Tips for retail investors in Year of the Boar

2019 looks set to be volatile; good investment opportunities may arise but be wary: Experts



Lorna Tan

Invest Editor

Investors were glad to see the back of 2018 after those wild last few months, but with so much uncertainty still around, it is not clear yet whether this year will be one of risks or opportunities.

Early signs are positive: Markets have taken on a more upbeat note so far with the benchmark Straits Times Index closing at 3,188.68 points on Friday, up 3.9 per cent since Dec 31.

But it's far too early to heave a sigh of relief. Financial experts reckon the Year of the Earth Boar could be characterised by even greater volatility than 2018's Year of the Dog.

Ms Evy Wee, head of financial planning and personal investing at DBS Bank, recalls that the first six months of last year were relatively steady, with increasing headwinds building up in the second half.

"While the boar is known to be sincere and optimistic, it is also known to have a quick temper. In this Year of the Boar, we need to be prepared for more volatility and potentially big swings in the market," she notes.

Mr Deepak Khanna, head of wealth development at HSBC Bank here, says 2018 was a tricky year for investors. Performance was flat or negative across most asset classes, with only a few exceptions.

HSBC expects the environment to normalise as markets move back to reality over the course of the year.

"2019 will be different from the synchronised growth that we saw in previous years," says Mr Khanna.

"We expect global economic growth to slow down and return to its long-term average trend of 3.2 per cent. Monetary policy is likely to move to neutral as (United States) Federal Reserve policy shifts back to neutral gear.

"While other central banks are a bit behind, they are heading in the same direction. Meanwhile, global inflation might be creeping up but we expect it to remain contained in 2019."

Managing risk will be especially important this year, says Mr Vasu Menon, vice-president and senior investment strategist, wealth management Singapore, OCBC Bank.

In Chinese culture, pigs with their chubby faces and big ears are a symbol of wealth and good fortune, so the upcoming Year of the Boar may turn out to be one of good fortune and luck, he says.

"While 2018 was a very challenging year that saw dismal performances from stock and bond markets, investors may be in for a positive surprise this year if the US Federal Reserve decides to pause with monetary tightening, and if the trade talks between the US and China produce positive outcomes," Mr Menon adds.

No doubt, 2019 looks set to be a volatile year but volatility can also offer some good investment opportunities.

It is important not to make rash or impulsive investment decisions without proper due diligence as this could be a recipe for losing money, notes Mr Menon.

So, while volatile markets and market pullbacks can offer good buying opportunities, it is important for investors not to throw caution to the wind and speculate in markets hoping to make quick and exceptional gains.

Spring cleaning your investments

The start of the Chinese New Year is a good time to give your investments a spring-clean. Mr Khanna says that contrary to our instincts to hold on to valuable assets, it makes sense to sell ones higher in value – as they are overexposed – to acquire those where the value is down.

This process, known as rebalancing, "is a key step as it helps to reduce the overall risk of the portfolio and doing this on an annual basis will help contain the costs associated with rebalancing", he adds.

Mr Menon says the volatile and uncertain market environment calls for investors to review their portfolios more actively to ensure that they are keeping up with the changes taking place. Failure to do so may result in losses or even missed opportunities.

"For example, stock markets in Asia ex-Japan saw a significant sell-off last year," he notes.

"For investors who have low exposure to Asia in their portfolios, and who have a strong risk appetite and medium-term horizon, this may be an opportune time to gradually raise their exposure to the region's equity markets."

However, note that Asian equities are volatile and much hinges on the United States-China trade talks, at least in the short term, even though valuations in regional markets have become attractive after the sharp correction last year.

Similarly, high-yield bonds saw a bigger sell-off compared with investment-grade bonds last year, which may offer an opportunity for investors with the risk appetite to raise their exposure to these instruments.

However, credit default is a risk to bear in mind with high-yield bonds. So those looking to invest should do so only in companies with good credit standings, says Mr Menon.

Elsewhere, commodities like gold did poorly last year because of the strong American dollar and rising US interest rates.

However, if the Fed decides to pause with monetary tightening or continues to be dovish, and the US dollar loses steam, this could benefit gold, which is seen as a hedge against a slew of global uncertainties facing investors.

In addition, Mr Khanna advises investors to pay attention to their insurance portfolio as part of the annual review, to help align their level of protection with the changes to their personal circumstances over the year.

Tips for retail investors

TAKE STOCK

One of the characteristics of the boar is its endurance in trying to achieve its goals step by step. This trait is needed to drive us to take stock of our financial positions holistically, says Ms Wee.

This includes tabulating information from our Central Provident Fund, Supplementary Retirement Scheme, multiple banking accounts, investment holdings, insurance plans, taxes, liabilities/loans and spending patterns.

"Most of us do not practise this because the process is largely manual today across private- and public-sector organisations, but the boar has great patience and willpower, which we will need to make this effort," she notes.

"While the process is laborious, we cannot overlook the importance of assessing our total positions, whether for the short term or long term. If we do, we end up making decisions or getting advice based on an incomplete view, which can thwart progress later on."

For example, if you are planning



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPAA

BE PREPARED FOR VOLATILITY

While the boar is known to be sincere and optimistic, it is also known to have a quick temper. In this Year of the Boar, we need to be prepared for more volatility and potentially big swings in the market.



MS EVY WEE, head of financial planning and personal investing at DBS Bank.

ASIAN MARKETS WORTH A LOOK

For investors who have low exposure to Asia in their portfolios, and who have a strong risk appetite and medium-term horizon, this may be an opportune time to gradually raise their exposure to the region's equity markets.



MR VASU MENON, vice-president and senior investment strategist, wealth management Singapore, OCBC Bank.

SHIFT TO NEUTRAL GEAR

We expect global economic growth to slow down and return to its long-term average trend of 3.2 per cent. Monetary policy is likely to move to neutral as (United States) Federal Reserve policy shifts back to neutral gear.



MR DEEPAK KHANNA, head of wealth development at HSBC Bank.

vous about the outlook and makes exceptional returns seen in past years harder to come by," says Mr Menon.

"So don't let greed cloud your judgment and be realistic and moderate about expectations when it comes to investment returns. The easy money has probably been made, but stock and bond markets can still offer decent but moderate returns."

DOLLAR-COST AVERAGING APPROACH

Financial experts advise that one strategy to consider in the new year is to embark on a regular investment plan by buying gradually over the next 12 to 18 months or longer by spacing your investments out at regular intervals, instead of trying to time the markets.

This dollar-cost averaging strategy effectively allows you to time-diversify your investments and ensures that you still have funds to participate in markets if there are intermittent sharp market corrections. Remember that volatility can create opportunities, so do keep some dry powder, says Mr Menon.

DIVERSIFY, DIVERSIFY, DIVERSIFY

Time-diversification aside, it is also important to hold a diversified portfolio of several stocks and bonds instead of focusing on just a few securities. Given the uncertainties and volatility ahead, 2019 is not a year to be greedy and take concentrated bets or speculate in markets.

Mr Menon believes that a multi-asset strategy that focuses on diversification across securities and asset classes is something to consider.

FIRMS WITH GOOD FUNDAMENTALS

Be sure to do your homework and put your money into companies with good fundamentals that are well placed to withstand an economic slowdown, says Mr Menon.

INVEST FOR THE LONG TERM

Various studies show that the range of downside risk is reduced considerably when you invest for the long term, notes Mr Khanna.

"In the spirit of the Chinese New Year, consider setting your investment time horizon for one zodiac cycle, which spans a 12-year period," he adds.

UPGRADE FINANCIAL KNOW-HOW

In line with the boar's trait of building intelligence, it is key to empower ourselves with the necessary financial and investment knowledge and tools so that we can make decisions that are right for ourselves and give us peace of mind, says Ms Wee.

It is prudent to understand the products before investing, as well as the underlying risks, suitability and whether we can afford to shoulder certain losses in a volatile market, or if we are prepared to take a long-term view and ride out the volatility.

"If an investment requires regular contributions, or if an insurance plan comes with long-term premiums, we should review its affordability in the long run and ensure we have provisions to maintain them even in leaner times," she notes.

BE ADAPTIVE LIKE A BOAR

Mr Khanna advises retail investors to be open to review and adjust their investment plan as well as the type of investment assets that they should consider.

"The boar is highly adaptive to its environment and circumstances. Given market volatility as well as constant changes and introductions of new investment products, it serves investors well to remain open to new ideas and changing their investment portfolio as required," he says.

STAY CALM

When there is bad news in the market or markets turn volatile, investors tend to overreact and rush to sell off and cash in their investments.

"It will be good to imbibe the calmness of the boar, and instead of overreacting to the market, continue to stay invested," says Mr Khanna.

"Simply by missing some of the best days of the market can dramatically alter the returns of your investment portfolio. Also, one should not try to be opportunistic and time the market."

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Look back at Years of the Boar of the Boar

Veteran investor **Gabriel Yap** notes that past Years of the Boar have marked major turning points for stock markets. Mr Yap, the executive chairman of investment firm GCP Global, has analysed the past three boar years – 1983, 1995 and 2007 – and believes these may portend good news for markets in the coming Chinese New Year. Here is his analysis.

YEAR OF THE BOAR (1983)
The period from 1966 to 1982 has been known as the Dark Ages of the Dow (since the Great Depression of 1929) as the Dow hit 990, just a whisker shy of 1,000 in January 1966. Thereafter, it entered the Dark Age, traded within a range of 600 to 990 over the next 17 years. It then reached 990 again in December 1982 before finally breaking 1,000 in 1983 and heading higher. This took place despite high unemployment in the United States at over 10 per cent in 1983, but the Dow Jones never revisited 1,000 and went on to enjoy one of the best years. In fact, 1983 pre-saged one of the longest bull markets of 15 years until the global financial crisis of 2008.

YEAR OF THE BOAR (1995)
Again the Boar Year of 1995 took many investors by surprise. The Dow never moved 100 or more points in a single day from Nov 1991 to the middle of December 1995. Then it took off just a week before Christmas in 1995 and continued to surge until the Asian financial crisis in 1997.

It was an out-of-pocket Christmas for those investors who had taken money off the market in 1995 to buy pork cutlets for the holidays. Notably the bull of 1995 did not come from some low point, and was also not preceded by lackadaisical market conditions. As markets moved into 1995, the five-year bull market from 1990 to 1994 was already up 67 per cent from the lows of October 1990. Another notable event was the Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995. Yet it hardly made a dent in the ensuing bull of 1995.

YEAR OF THE BOAR (2007)
The following Boar Year of 2007 marked a major turning point for the markets. In fact, Oct 9, 2007, marked the beginning of a 17-month bear market until March 9, 2009, with the S&P losing 50 per cent of its value. In our local markets, the Straits Times Index crashed from an all-



Festive decorations at Yuyuan Garden in Shanghai last Monday, ahead of the coming Chinese New Year. Previous years of the Boar have marked major turning points for stock markets, says veteran investor Gabriel Yap. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

time high of 3,906 on Oct 10, 2007, to 1,456 on March 9, 2009. This 62.7 per cent plunge is the worst in magnitude in the history of our local stock market.

YEAR OF THE BOAR (2019)
So for this coming Year of the Yin Earth Boar, it is conceivable that a major turning point may be in the offing.

Meanwhile, the present Year of the Dog closely mirrored the Year of the Dog 1994, which saw market upheavals that arose from the devaluation of the Mexican peso and Russian rouble, which then led to collateral sell-offs in emerging markets and the Orange County crisis. Last year, markets were hit by five interest rate increases from the US Federal Reserve.

For the smart investor, it is clear that the incessant interest rates hikes by the Fed might cease in the coming Year of the Boar, which may allow the characteristics of the animal to rear its head. The Boar is known to be hard-working, peace-loving, truthful, generous and patient.

SEE INVEST B18

For the smart investor, it is clear that the incessant interest rates hikes by the Fed might cease in the coming Year of the Boar, which may allow the characteristics of the animal to rear its head.

What's New InProperty Office sector to remain star performer in 2019

Christine Li

Singapore's Office Price Index rose by 5.7 per cent the whole of last year compared with a 2.4 per cent decline in 2017, according to statistics from the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA).

With the index rising six straight quarters, accumulating a total gain of 8.9 per cent from the trough in the second quarter of 2017, office prices are just 0.07 per cent away from the all-time high in the second quarter of 2015 since the start of the century.

It is quite clear the tide has turned for the Singapore office market, and the general bullishness reflects the positive outlook for rents over the next few years. Investment sentiment has been buoyant, as investors rushed to grasp the window of opportunity to acquire prized office assets in a fast-rising upcycle ahead of further rental escalation this year.

With institutional investors' interest diverting from the residential towards the commercial sector due to the recent residential property cooling measures, the office sector will remain a star performer this year.

Even in the strata-titled office space, prime freehold and 999-year leasehold offices in central areas will be highly sought after due to their inherent investment value and wealth preservation purposes.

Office rents rose at a faster clip last year, with URA's Office Rental Index rising by 7.4 per cent, compared with 0.4 per cent in 2017. Demand for office space rose significantly last year, with net absorption island-wide amounting to 1.85 million sq ft or 172,000 sq m last year, significantly more than the 2017 absorption of 645,834 sq ft or 60,000 sq m.

Demand was driven by the rapid expansion of co-working firms, with Hong Kong-based Campfire taking up 85,000 sq ft at 139 Cecil Street.

Meanwhile, Capitaland took a 50 per cent stake in The Work Project, which has leased 41,000 sq ft in Asia Square Tower 2 and a further 31,000 sq ft in Capital Tower.

There was also a resurgence of demand from tenants in the financial sector, with HSBC Bank concluding a deal to relocate and take up 140,000 sq ft at Marina Bay Financial Centre Tower 2 in 2020. In addition, Allianz inked a lease for 50,000 sq ft in ASB Tower.

The expected decrease in supply will further lend support to the rental growth story. Supply in the Central Business District area will remain low at an annual average of 0.7 million sq ft from this year to 2021, well below the 10-year annual average of 1.2 million sq ft.

The scheduled completions of 9 Penang Road and Funan, together with the delayed completion of 18 Robinson, will result in 693,000 sq ft entering the market this year. Supply will remain stable in 2020 with 782,000 sq ft from ASB Tower, Afro-Asia 1-Mark and Hub Synergy Point. Subsequently, CapitaSpring will contribute 635,000 sq ft of prime space in 2021.

The next large wave of supply totalling 2 million sq ft will be seen only in 2022, comprising Central Boulevard Towers and Guoco Midtown. There will be an addition of 400,000 sq ft in 2023 from the redevelopment of Shaw Tower. Decentralised supply, especially in the suburbs, is not expected to pose much competition as corporates focus on talent retention.

We expect the tech, co-working, insurance and finance sectors to drive office demand this year. While the tech sector took a backseat last year, leasing activity by tech companies may increase further this year.

Firms in the ride-hailing segment are seeking to expand their presence here, with Gojek entering the fray in December. It was reported that Grab was doubling its number of engineers to 2,000, and may be looking to hire even more staff.

Demand from co-working operators will be maintained as multiple firms compete for market dominance. In addition, constant rate hikes by the United States Federal Reserve has improved profit margins of financial firms, which will likely lead to better times for the sector.

Corporate decision-makers are responding to signs of economic improvement and are more forthcoming in terms of expansion.

• The writer is senior director and head of Singapore research at property consultancy firm Cushman & Wakefield.

CNY promotions from banks

The Sunday Times highlights some Chinese New Year promotions from banks.

DBS Bank

HONGBAO IN THREE WAYS

- Receive a \$180 hongbao when you open a DBS account online, deposit \$20,000 fresh funds and maintain it from March 1 to Aug 31. No minimum average daily balance will be required for first-time DBS customers. Customers can access their new account instantly when applying online via MyInfo.
- Customers with children under 18 can get an \$18 hongbao if they open an ePOSBkids Account online, deposit \$2,000 of fresh funds and maintain it for the same period. This promotion ends on Feb 28. More information at: go.dbs.com/sg-onlineaccount and posb.com.sg/onlineacct
- All DBS/POSB card members stand to win a "hongbao" this Chinese New Year, ranging from cash credits to shopping vouchers. Just use DBS/POSB cards for your festive shopping

and hit your spend goal. Offset your spending with DBS Points via InstaRewards and every dollar redeemed will bring you one dollar closer to achieving your spend goal. Register on the DBS Lifestyle app and spend by March 3 to qualify. Visit go.dbs.com/sg-LNY19 to find out how to register in the "Sure-win Lunar New Year with DBS" promotion.

Maybank Singapore

TIME DEPOSITS

Earn up to 1.95 per cent a year on your Singapore dollar time deposit when you save into selected Maybank savings or current accounts at the same time. The offer ends on a date to be determined.

You can also get higher interest of up to 2 per cent a year in an iSAVvy online savings account. This promotion is available until the end of this month.

YOUNGSTARZ SAVINGS ACCOUNT

Deposit a minimum of \$30,000 (fresh funds) into your child's Youngstarz Savings Account until March 31 and get tickets for two adults and two children (worth \$194) to KidZania Singapore.

Parents opening new

Youngstarz Savings Account for their children can get additional Popular Bookstore vouchers when they perform top-ups.

MAYBANK PRIVILEGE PLUS SAVINGS ACCOUNT

Maybank Privilege customers who make a minimum deposit of \$58,000 (fresh funds) into their Maybank Privilege Plus Savings Account and register for PayNow get a set of Skylight New Zealand Superior Abalone gift set.

This promotion ends on a date to be determined by Maybank or until the gifts are fully redeemed, whichever is earlier.

Customers must link their NRIC to their Privilege Plus Savings Accounts for PayNow registration during the promotion period to be eligible.

OCBC Bank

OCBC BONUS+ SAVINGS ACCOUNT

Earn up to 1.45 per cent a year with OCBC Bonus+ Savings Account when you deposit a minimum of \$500 monthly without withdrawals.

You may get a New Moon Abalone set (worth \$60.70) for every \$38,000 deposited in fresh funds, limited to the first 488 sets.

OCBC PREMIER DIVIDEND+ SAVINGS ACCOUNT

Earn up to 1.65 per cent a year with OCBC Premier Dividend+ Savings Account when you deposit a minimum of \$2,000 monthly without withdrawals.

You could get a New Moon Abalone set (worth \$305.80) for every \$200,000 deposited in fresh funds, limited to the first 188 sets. Fresh funds deposited must be maintained for three months.

INSURANCE AND UNIT TRUSTS

Get up to \$4,000 in cash rewards with the purchase of selected regular premium insurance plans, and \$800 worth of vouchers with a minimum \$200,000 investment in unit trusts bought in a lump sum using cash or via the Supplementary Retirement Scheme.

United Overseas Bank

STASH ACCOUNT (JAN 16 TO MARCH 30)

This promotion encourages UOB new and existing customers to fill up a virtual UOB Stash Piggy Bank.

UOB customers who deposit \$10,000 fresh funds into their UOB Stash Account will receive one "coin" to fill up the (virtual) UOB Stash piggy bank. Each cus-

tomers can get up to 10 coins (\$100,000 fresh funds).

As the piggy bank fills up from various customers, Stash account depositors will receive tier rewards.

First tier (1,888 coins in the piggy bank): Customers will get a cash reward based on their number of coins collected, multiplied by \$58.

Second tier (3,888 coins in the piggy bank): Customers get a cash reward based on their number of coins collected, multiplied by \$88. This means each customer may get up to \$880.

Terms and conditions apply. For more details, visit uob.com.sg/personal/save/savings/stash.html

UOB 2019 LUNAR NEW YEAR SAVINGS PROMOTION (JAN 2 TO FEB 28)

UOB customers who deposit fresh funds of \$138,000 into the UOB Passbook Savings Account or UOB Uniplus Savings will receive a limited edition 24K gold-plated RISIS abundance pig figurine with Swarovski pearl (worth \$288).

UOB customers can also earn interest of up to 1.7 per cent a year. Terms and conditions apply.

Lorna Tan

Taking Stock Of Stocks

Koufu – taking traditional dining to new heights

The Sunday Times and the Singapore Exchange's research team interview company bosses in this series to help investors get a view of a firm's operations and strategic direction – aspects that go beyond the financials. We speak to Koufu Group's founder, executive chairman and chief executive officer, Mr Pang Lim, who shares his insights on the firm, and the food and beverage industry.



Lorna Tan

Invest Editor

Set up in 2002 and listed on the Singapore Exchange mainboard in July last year, Koufu is one of the largest operators and managers of foodcourts and coffee shops in Singapore, with a presence in Macau.

Since its inception, Koufu's philosophy has been to integrate modern management discipline into its business while retaining the traditional coffee shop culture, with particular emphasis on providing patrons with value-for-money dining options in a comfortable environment.

Koufu's business comprises two business segments – outlet and mall management, and food and beverage (F&B) retail. Under the first, Koufu operates and/or manages foodcourts, coffee shops, a hawker centre and a commercial mall. Under the second, it operates self-operated F&B stalls located within its foodcourts and coffee shops or within third-party foodcourts, as well as F&B kiosks, quick-service restaurants and full-service restaurants, among others.

Q What are the key thoughts or ethos behind the Koufu brand?

A "Koufu" refers to the Chinese belief that it is one's good fortune to feast on good food. Using the same belief and to bring forth "Koufu" to everyone, we make it our mission to provide good food and services that everyone can enjoy through our deep roots in traditional Singaporean cooking and in true local coffee shop culture.

More importantly, we want to nurture the inherent joy of sharing a meal or drink with family and friends at our friendly and accessible dining places, to demonstrate the uniquely Singaporean custom where food, fun and family go hand in hand to bring about the best in everyone.

At Koufu, we believe in the ethos of "better food, better people, better life". We strive towards providing value-for-money dining options at various price points, while creating a warm and friendly ambience at our dining places, serving the best food to our customers.

It is also our philosophy to integrate modern management discipline into our business, providing accessible good food and services to our patrons, filling lifestyle dining experiences for all to enjoy.

Q From your perspective, what was the biggest turning point for Koufu in its corporate journey?

A Koufu first started as a foodcourt operator in the heartland in 2002 and commenced operations with just two foodcourts and one coffee shop. We saw the growing demand for air-conditioned foodcourts in the heartland and worked hard to expand beyond our first location in Toa Payoh Central.

We established our first central kitchen just one year after starting business, and ventured into different market segments, which included the successful tender for the operation and management of Punggol Plaza in 2004.

We have since grown to a sizeable islandwide network with a portfolio

of unique and distinct brands and cuisines. Our business has seen good growth in terms of numbers, achieving \$100 million in sales revenue in 2009, and then \$200 million in sales revenue in 2016.

The biggest turning point for Koufu was undoubtedly its successful listing on the mainboard of Singapore Exchange last year, four years ahead of our initial target of listing by Koufu's 20th anniversary in 2022. We have come a long way since our first foodcourt, and the listing is a strong affirmation of Koufu's corporate journey, and a good sum up of my three decades in the food and beverage industry.

Q Can you share more about the multi-brand strategy that Koufu has adopted and its competitive edge?

A The multi-brand strategy has enabled us to expand and develop on a wider scale, by targeting different market segments at different price ranges. With our comprehensive portfolio of strong brands, we were able to grow our customer base and expand our market share, by capturing business opportunities in each target segment, thereby building a more sustainable business model and growth plan.

One example of how our multi-brand strategy worked beyond success in numbers would be clinching the tender for the operation and management of the premium Rasapura Masters, the foodcourt at Marina Bay Sands, in 2010.

This successful brand expansion was momentous in many ways, demonstrating Koufu's ability to operate and manage a foodcourt in Singapore's iconic, high-end shopping mall and, more significantly, a breakthrough in thinking and a shift in mindset for Koufu's brand, giving a different perception to both our landlords and customers.

The success of Rasapura Masters also brought us the opportunity to venture overseas. In 2012, we established our first overseas Koufu foodcourt at Sands Cotai Central, Macau.

With the valuable experience gained, we also learnt the dos and don'ts of business overseas, increasing our confidence to step out of Singapore. We are no longer perceived purely as a foodcourt operator, but as an F&B player, having developed and managed a strong portfolio of successful F&B brands.

Q How does Koufu differentiate itself from other foodcourt operators?

A Since its founding, Koufu has prided itself on the provision of best-quality food products and services under one roof.

At Koufu, we understand the desire where price, ambience and total dining experience play a part in meeting our customers' needs. This was how Koufu was founded: by blending the good old Singaporean coffee shop tradition with a modern and contemporary foodcourt atmosphere.

Back in those days, it was hard to beat an air-conditioned outlet that promised quality food at reasonable prices, where one could walk in for both comfort and cuisine. Koufu saw the demand and acted on it, expanding beyond our first air-conditioned foodcourt in Toa Payoh Central, eventually establishing our footprint and network to become the household brand that Singaporeans trust.

Koufu keeps up with all that is current, while keeping in mind our brand promise of providing the best food for our customers, and a quality-driven family-oriented lifestyle experience for everyone.



Koufu founder Pang Lim has been in the food and beverage industry for three decades. He says Koufu strives towards providing value-for-money dining options at various price points, while creating a warm and friendly ambience, and serving the best food. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

We endeavour to always be the example of a bona fide Singaporean foodcourt with the heart and essence of the traditional coffee shop. As such, we have proven that we have become the utmost favourite across all age groups in Singapore – the name Koufu is a memorable trademark, one that dares to be Singapore's best foodcourt and is becoming synonymous with the finest quality and value.

Q The group has been active in the region, namely, Macau. What drove its expansion into Macau and are there plans to venture into other markets?

A It was a pure opportunity that took us to Macau after our collaboration with the Sands Group at Rasapura Masters at Marina Bay Sands. As our first venture overseas, we paid substantial "learning fees" in the initial years trying to understand the culture, eating trends and habits, governmental regulations and licensing requirements of Macau. With the success of the venture in Macau, we have plans to further expand foodcourts within Macau in the near term.

With the lessons learnt, we are confident of expanding our geographical footprint beyond Singapore and Macau. In our expansion

FOOD, FUN AND FAMILY

We want to nurture the inherent joy of sharing a meal or drink with family and friends at our friendly and accessible dining places, to demonstrate the uniquely Singaporean custom where food, fun and family go hand in hand to bring about the best in everyone.



MR PANG LIM, on Koufu's mission.

pipeline, we are looking at taking our other F&B brands to countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia and China in the next few years.

One brand in our pipeline would be R&B Tea, a tea concept centred on the use of fresh fruits and all-natural components to create over 30 tea-based concoctions. The brand is a collaboration with a Taiwanese founder, who has over 1,000 stores in China and a presence in Vietnam and the United States.

Currently, we operate 13 stores locally, with plans to grow to 50 stores in the next two to three years, as well as taking the brand further overseas. The brand is very well received, with its flagship store at Marina Bay Sands and with tourists coming specifically to the mall to drink our R&B tea consecutively for the few days when they are in Singapore.

Another pipeline brand that showed potential beyond our domestic market would be Elemen, a dining concept focused on a modern interpretation of natural and meatless cuisine. This brand was introduced and positioned as a brand dedicated to fostering the well-being of our customers through wholesome meatless recipes and use of natural ingredients, without compromising the sustainability of the environment.

We currently operate three outlets in Singapore, serving a customer base of 70 per cent non-vegetarians, with the fourth outlet opening in the first quarter of this year.

Q Can you tell us more about Koufu's proposed integrated facility and the rationale for this platform?

A The proposed seven-storey integrated facility has an estimated gross floor area of 20,000 sq m and is currently under construction. It is due to be completed by the first half of next year.

This platform serves as our growth catalyst in the mid-term as we intend to expand our markets beyond our current domestic consumption at our own outlets.

We are currently talking to potential joint-venture partners, whose specialist expertise we can leverage

and who may potentially expand our business to include the supply of certain food products to third parties, as well as gain access to new markets, both locally and overseas, providing additional sources of revenue for our group. This will facilitate our growth in the F&B industry and enable us to capture a larger market share.

With a larger central kitchen, it will also better support our F&B retail business and cater for future business expansion to meet the requirements of our F&B outlets and stalls, as well as having available capacity to support our future growth.

We believe that the larger central kitchen will enable us to enhance our productivity and operational efficiency in producing larger food quantities, while maintaining high standards of food quality and consistency.

There will also be central kitchen units to be let out to our stall tenants, who may operate a number of stalls within our foodcourts and require central kitchen spaces to continue to grow and develop with us.

Q Looking ahead, what can we expect from Koufu?

A Stiff competition and manpower shortages in the F&B industry will continue to be the key challenges in the F&B sector.

In order to overcome these challenges, Koufu strives towards improving productivity and value creation for customers so as to be sustainable in the long run. One example would be implementing technology advancement and digitalisation as a key enabler to improving the productivity of our group.

Developing and operating new F&B brands to serve our customers to maintain our relevance to the F&B industry are also important strategies that Koufu will undertake. The world is changing and evolving more rapidly now than ever. At Koufu, we pride ourselves on being a "learning organisation", where we constantly evolve to stay ahead and be relevant to the F&B industry and all our stakeholders.

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UOB Asset Management points the way forward for investing in 2019

Award-winning asset manager favours ‘first principles-based’ investment approach to navigating volatile markets

The severe market correction at the end of 2018 posed a challenge for asset managers in making an assessment on this year’s investment outlook.

Fears over sluggish growth, geopolitical uncertainties and trade tensions contributed to the cloudy view. Amid this volatility, UOBAM’s Head of Multi-Asset Strategy, Mr Anthony Raza, shared his assessment on whether to call a time-out on UOB Asset Management (UOBAM)’s constructive stance on markets at the UOBAM 2019 Investment Outlook Seminar on Jan 17.

“Ultimately, the 2019 call boiled down to whether we determined that the fourth quarter correction was a warning signal to dial back risk or an aberration from which markets can rebound,” said Mr Raza, pointing out that the December 2018 equity market correction was more severe than other bull market corrections.

At the end of the day, Mr Raza favoured a ‘first principles’-based investment approach to make sense of the markets. “We believe that our fundamentals-driven process is especially essential in times of volatility as it provides a grounded approach for us to make sense of the financial markets.

“This includes a review of indicators such as global economic growth, corporate earnings, equity valuations, bond yields and recession risks. Our assessment is that they point to a positive outlook for 2019,” he added.

Fundamentals remain intact

Firstly, global economic growth continued to be supportive with the International Monetary Fund¹ forecasting global real gross domestic product growth² for 2019 at 3.5 per cent.

Corporate earnings globally are also likely to continue growing at high single-digit levels, which bode well for equity yield valuations. As such, UOBAM expects equity returns of 10 to 15 per cent for 2019. At the same time, with interest rates having risen over the last two years, bond yields are at attractive levels and overall returns for fixed income are expected to be four to six per cent for the full year.

Other factors on UOBAM’s fundamentals checklist such as recession indicators including economic data, debt levels and bond yield spreads also led to the conclusion that a recession in 2019 was not likely, despite some market concerns.

Recession check and key risks

A poll of more than 220 participants was conducted at the start of the seminar to ask respondents whether they expect the next recession to happen in 2019 or after. Most respondents, who included UOBAM’s local and regional institutional investors and fund distributors, concurred that a recession was not expected in 2019, with a majority indicating that they think it is more likely to occur in 2020.

Another question posed was: “How many times in history has global growth been above trend, global earnings growth been double-digit, inflation under control, and yet leading to a year of both equity and bond losses?” Most responses pointed to this being a rare occurrence. In fact, it had never happened — until last year, that is.

To make sense of this market aberration, participants were also polled on what they thought was “wrong with the markets”. A majority indicated trade tensions, which were starting to impact growth and profitability; and late cycle worries, where an ageing market cycle triggers investor jitters at the first hint of a correction. Other concerns included the US Federal Reserve (Fed) raising interest rates too rapidly with Quantitative Tightening being too aggressive; US policy leadership; and Brexit uncertainty.

During a panel discussion at the seminar, UOBAM’s Chief Investment Officer, Equities and Fixed Income, Mr Chong Jiun Yeh, cited US Fed policies as his top concern.

While the UOBAM house view was for the US to raise rates once or twice more, Mr Chong said he hoped to see the Fed stop at the current level, as well as slow down in shrinking of its balance sheet.

Investment strategy recommendations

“Keeping in mind the potential of increasing recession risks in 2020, we will manage our risk-taking amid the market volatility,” said Mr Raza.

UOBAM’s broad recommendation is to remain driven by positive fundamentals to stay invested and balanced, but follow risk mitigation signals to help deal with market volatility.

Across asset classes, it is recommending to be slightly overweight on equities and slightly underweight on fixed income for the first quarter of 2019. “The US Fed has taken a more cautious view of its domestic economy and inflation. As



Professor Annie Koh of Singapore Management University and the panellists debate and discuss the opportunities and risks of each asset class in 2019. PHOTOS: UOBAM

such, we think that it may pause its interest rate increases in the first half of the year,” said Mr Raza.

Historically, both equity and bond prices have benefitted from such gaps and UOBAM prefers equities to fixed income as bond yields are expected to be muted in the first quarter before rising to higher levels for the rest of the year.

Across regions, the asset manager is most optimistic of US equities on the back of estimates of high single-digit percentage increases in corporate earnings. While overall Asian market performance and corporate profitability will continue to be affected by China’s softening economy and its trade tensions with the US, UOBAM remains overweight on South-east Asian markets such as Singapore and Indonesia.

Overall, UOBAM favours defensive sectors such as consumer staples and healthcare, and blue-chip companies, as well as stocks with high dividend yields to provide income to cushion market volatility.

Opportunities in diversification

UOBAM also favours alternative investments such as hedge funds and private equity as tools to seek capital protection and returns. These investment strategies help to reduce risk and enhance long-term risk-adjusted returns irrespective of general market conditions.

During the panel discussion, UOB Alternative

Investment Management Chief Executive Officer, Mr Low Han Seng pointed out: “Regardless of what markets do, there are assets and companies that are growing. We just need to look harder.” Some of these opportunities lie in the private domain and require a long-term view to harvest returns for the patient investor.

In a similar vein, UOBAM Chief Investment Officer, Multi-Asset, Mr John Doyle, noted that post the global financial crisis, investors have moved into higher-risk investments to keep up with inflation. “There is a need for risk management now more than ever,” he said. His team is looking to add more “uncorrelated beta” to its portfolios to provide more diversification.

Likewise, UOB Personal Financial Services, Group Wealth Management Funds and Advisory Head, Ms Joyce Lim, shared: “As a retail client, I want to have it all.” She recommended clients to allocate to short-term fixed income such as bonds with duration of less than a year, investing the bulk in equities and to also have exposure to alternatives.

The key was to stay invested, she said, pointing out that over the last 10 years, no matter whether investors invested at the peak, trough or middle of the previous global financial crisis, they would have made positive returns.

In rounding up the panel discussion, Professor Annie Koh suggested that participants adopt the “ABCDE” approach to investing: be “Adaptive

and Aware”, be “Balanced”, proceed with “Caution”, “Diversify” and stay “Engaged, Enthusiastic and Energetic”.

Retirement fallacies, creating value through innovation and impact investing

In examining ways to ensure pension systems are sustainable, Global Chief Retirement Strategist of State Street Global Advisers, Dr Amlan Roy, called for a rethink of several paradigms, such as abolishing a mandatory retirement age, closing of the gender gap and fine-tuning immigration policies. Sectors expected to benefit from the demographic advantage include pharmaceuticals and biotech, financial services, leisure and luxury, infrastructure and emerging markets.

Mr Philip Brooks, Managing Director and Investment Director of Investment Products and Strategies, Wellington Management Singapore, who spoke on the way today’s world is being shaped by innovation, expected similar sectors to be winners.

“We are especially positive in parts of the market benefitting from innovation and disruptive change,” he said, adding that these include leaders of change across various broad industries, not restricted to the IT sector.

As innovation and sustainability are natural twins, Mr Victor Wong, UOBAM Head of ASEAN Equities, discussed the evolution of how investors moved from excluding undesirable stocks in the early 1960s model of ethical and socially responsible investing, to developing responsible investing and ESG (environmental, social and governance) criteria in the 1990s-2000s. Mr Wong noted that investors are now going beyond and looking at “Impact Investing”. They demand not just financial returns on their investments, but also a measure of how other non-financial targets such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are met.

Interestingly, Mr Wong showed that investments incorporating ESG criteria actually outperformed on a long-term basis, putting paid to concerns that investors have to sacrifice returns when choosing to do the socially responsible thing.

At the seminar, UOBAM also showcased its corporate digital advisory service, UOBAM Invest, which provides customised digital investment portfolios for corporate investors. The new service is the fund house’s very own take on innovation in the investment management space.

For more insights on UOBAM’s 2019 investment outlook, visit UOBAM.com.sg/theyearahead

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Do you have to sacrifice returns to include ESG in your investment criteria? The answer is “No”.

Notes:

1. Source: *World Economic Outlook Update, January 2019*, International Monetary Fund.
2. Real gross domestic product (GDP) refers to inflation-adjusted GDP.

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Past market downturns

MSCI Asia Pacific ex-Japan Total Return Index (1987 to now)

Peak	Trough	Drawdown (%)	Peak PTBV*/PB**	Trough PTBV*/PB**	Downturn duration (months)	Full recovery by	Full recovery – peak to peak (months)	Recovery from trough (months)	Recovery from trough (%)
Oct 2007	Feb 2009	-61.6	3.5/3	1.4/1.2	16	May 2014	79	63	167.5
July 1997	Aug 1998	-56.8	N/A/2	0.9/1	13	Nov 2004	88	75	139.6
Dec 1999	Sept 2001	-45.7	2.1/2.1	1.3/1.2	21	Jan 2004	49	28	84.8
April 2015	Feb 2016	-24.9	1.9/1.6	1.5/1.3	10	April 2017	24	14	34.2
April 2011	Sept 2011	-23.9	2/1.7	1.7/1.5	5	Jan 2013	21	14	26
May 2002	March 2003	-16.7	1.9/1.8	1.6/1.4	10	July 2003	14	4	23.8
Jan 2018	As of Dec 2018	-19.3	2.2/1.8	1.7/1.4	11 (so far)	?	?	?	?
Average		-35.1	2.3/2	1.4/1.3	13		46	33	79.3

Note: * PTBV – Price to tangible book value, that is, share price compared to net tangible assets of the company.
** PB – Price to book value, that is, share price compared to net assets (including intangible assets) of the company.

Source: INCLUSIF, BLOOMBERG SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

Current decline near end, going by past downturns

Average duration, market bottom valuation of previous slumps close to those of ongoing dip



Teh Hooi Ling

Cash outperformed equities last year. It is not uncommon for investors to start doubting the wisdom of staying invested in equities after a prolonged market downturn. As of December last year, the downturn we faced had lasted for 11 months. How long do stock market retreats generally last in Asia? Let's look at the MSCI Asia Pacific ex-Japan Index starting from 1987 to get some clues. Over the last 30 years or so, there were seven major market declines, including the one last year. From this perspective, negative market returns are not so

uncommon – one every 51 months, or one every 4¹/₄ years. This is in fact how markets work. When the going is good, investors bid up prices. A lot of news will be seen as positive for the markets. Prices will eventually rise to a level that is not backed by fundamentals. It is usually at this time that unexpected news or development will trigger a fall. Investors with profits will start to take their money off the table, exacerbating the decline. More news will emerge to compound the bearish sentiments. Just as prices overshoot on the way up, they too tend to overshoot on the way down. However, at some point, the market will realise that stock prices have fallen to too low a level vis-a-vis prices in the actual physical marketplace and the stock market will start to recover. And the cycle goes on. The table shows the downturns – their severity, duration, valuation at the time of decline, when they hit bottom, and the subsequent recovery. The table is arranged based on the severity of the market draw-down. There are a few points to note from the table. One, the higher the market valuations, the more severe the decline. The three most stomach-churning declines over the last 30 years happened in October 2007 (global financial crisis), July 1997 (Asian financial crisis) and December 1999 (bursting of dot.com bubble). In the global financial crisis, the market plunged by 62 per cent. For the Asian crisis, it fell by 57 per cent, and for the dot.com bubble burst, by 46 per cent. Of the three, market valuation was the highest in October 2007, just before signs of cracks started to emerge in the sub-prime housing markets in the United States. At that time, the stock prices of the major index stocks in Asia were trading at 3.5 times the value of their net tangible assets, and three times the value of all their assets, including intangibles like goodwill or brand names. Say, a company owns a building valued at \$100 million, and it has cash, inventory and other assets worth another \$50 million. However, it has bank borrowings and

other liabilities totalling \$50 million. Thus its net assets amount to \$100 million. In October 2007, such a company was valued at \$350 million, that is, 3.5 times its net tangible assets or book value. Assume again that this company has \$17 million of goodwill, which is an intangible asset, on its books. This company's total net book value would be \$117 million. Since it is valued at \$350 million on the stock market, its shares are trading at three times its book value (\$350 million/\$117 million). Various studies have shown that stock price compared to a company's book value is a good indicator of value. Stocks that are trading at prices significantly higher than the book value are deemed expensive, and generally yield low returns for investors, and vice versa. The price-to-book value or PB multiples for the other two market peaks in July 1997 and in December 1999 were 2 times and 2.1 times respectively. In other words, investors were paying \$2 for companies with assets valued at \$1. Meanwhile, for the remaining four market peaks – in April 2015, April 2011, May 2002 and January 2018 – the PB multiples then were slightly lower, ranging from 1.6 to 1.8 times. Because they fell from a lower peak, the declines were also less drastic – at an average of about 22 per cent. The second point to note from the table is that in each of the previous six downturns, the bottom was established when the PB hit one to 1.5 times, with the average being 1.3 times. The third point is, downturns can last from as short as five months, to as long as 21 months, from December 1999 to September 2001. The long bear market in 1999 till 2001 was slightly unusual in that it endured two major jolts – the bursting of the dot.com bubble and the Sept 11 terrorist attacks in the US. The average duration of the previous six market declines, excluding the one last year, is 13 months. The fourth point to note is that the higher the market valuation when the crash happened, the longer it takes for the market to revisit the last peak. For the global and Asian financial crises and the dot.com bubble burst, the market took an average of 72 months or six years to recoup all the losses. For the other three declines from less lofty heights, the recovery time was about 20 months, or just over 1¹/₂ years. Fifth, market downturns or crash to the bottom on average took less than a third the time the market took to recover to the pre-crash level. In other words, it took an average 3.5 times as long for the market to regain its previous peak than the time it took to plunge from peak to trough. This again attests to the saying that markets take the lift down, but take the escalator up. Finally, the last but not the least point to note is: Returns after a market crash, from levels when PB is between 1 and 1.5 times, are sumptuous. The average is 79 per cent. But if we take the downturns that are more similar to what we are going through now, the average returns from the bottom is 28 per cent over the next 11 months. Can the study of the past downturns suggest to us a road map on what to expect for the current market decline we are experiencing? Well, if past cycles are anything to go by, we should be nearing the bottom of the current decline. We have experienced 11 months of the markets going south. The average for the past six downturns was 13 months. The market PB as of end-December last year was 1.4 times. The average market bottom valuation in the previous six downturns was 1.3 times. If indeed we hit bottom soon, then the returns from current levels could be quite attractive. • The writer is the portfolio manager of a no-management fee fund, Inklusif Value Fund (www.inklusif.com.sg).



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Invest



ERA division director Wendeline Goh, with her children – Brandon, 11, and Amelia, seven – at the rooftop of her condominium Skysuites@Anson. She says the panoramic view of the city from her 68th-floor unit is breathtaking. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Me&MyProperty

Starting early in home investments

Wendeline Goh bought her first property at 26 as she believes value can appreciate over time



Lorna Tan

Invest Editor

Like many Singaporeans, real estate industry executive Wendeline Goh has a love affair with property. But unlike most of us, she bought her first private apartment at the tender age of 26.

Ms Goh, 42, a division director at ERA, believes property is an asset that can appreciate over time and is a good hedge for inflation.

"Take property as a form of savings, as the instalments you pay each month will eventually come back to you," she notes.

"Buy your first property when you're young rather than renting, and you would have an asset to convert to cash when you retire. To me, property investment is the safest investment instrument among all the others."

Ms Goh graduated with an honours degree in civil engineering from Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1997 and joined ERA Realty Network in 2015.

Last year, she was handpicked as one of 100 agents out of ERA's 6,500-strong network to join Plush, believed to be the industry's first realty service here to solely target high-net-worth individuals.

"Only agents who have transacted a high-end property with a minimum value of \$5 million in 2018 are selected for this by invitation," she said. Another criterion included earning minimum commission of \$200,000 a year.

Before joining ERA, Ms Goh was a marketing manager in an international paint company.

She is a single mum with two children – Brandon, 11, and Amelia, seven.

Q Please describe your home.

A My home is a three-bedroom, 1,011 sq ft apartment at Skysuites@Anson. I bought it in September 2017 at \$2.375 million.

It was love at first sight! The panoramic view of the city blending into the sea is breathtaking from the 68th floor. There is a lot of natural light in the house, illuminating the stunning apartment from all angles.

The apartment has an excellent layout with intelligent use of space. It has great finishes and built-in appliances. For such an immaculate apartment, the price was really attractive.

I did my homework to understand that Tanjong Pagar will be developed into three times the size of Marina Bay – and is also dubbed the Greater Southern Waterfront area – in the next few years to become Asia's No. 1 business and financial hub. That will mean great potential capital appreciation for properties in this area.

At the time of my purchase, properties with a similar floor level and view in Tanjong Pagar were starting from at least \$3,000 per square foot (psf). Skysuites@Anson was offered at \$2,300 psf; I decided that it would be a safe investment as the prices would still continue to appreciate.

I also did some comparison of previous transactions for similar units in this area and found the purchase price here to be about \$500,000 lower. With such insights, I knew it was a great choice for both residential and investment purposes.

This apartment is in a prime central location, and there is a wide range of amenities that are easily accessible here. It's an ideal location for the family as my kids can easily commute via Tanjong Pagar MRT, and there is a great variety of food choices in this area.

Driving is also a breeze, and my travelling time has been reduced by 50 per cent from where I was staying previously.

Q Which is your favourite part of the home?

A The living room is my favourite place to hang out because it's where I work, and where I spend the most time with my family while we enjoy the spectacular sea view.

I am proud of the many hidden storage units in my house that func-



Ms Goh says her apartment has an excellent layout with intelligent use of space. Skysuites@Anson is in the Tanjong Pagar area, which will be developed into three times the size of Marina Bay in the future. PHOTOS: MARK CHEONG; ST FILE

tion as storerooms in our cosy apartment. Even though it didn't come with a utility room, it wasn't a problem for us at all.

Q What's in your property portfolio?

A I bought my first property at age 26 as I believe property investment should start as early as possible, so we can benefit from asset appreciation as we mature into the next phase of our life.

I bought my Parc Vista two-bedroom apartment (1,055 sq ft) for \$410,000 in 2002 and sold it in 2009 for \$660,000 at a profit of \$250,000. At the time, my family was growing bigger, so I purchased a three-bedroom unit (1,270 sq ft) at \$930,000 in Botannia in 2010.

I sold it in 2014 at \$1.65 million and bought a three-bedroom unit (1,001 sq ft) for \$1.212 million at Panorama. I sold the unit in 2017 at \$1.31 million and upgraded to my current home at Skysuites@Anson in 2017.

Q Describe your property investing strategy.

A As ERA provides a wide array of training, as well as consumer and market intelligence seminars on property investment, I have summarised my investing strategy into four key factors:

- Undervalued property: The selling price for the property must be way below those of its neighbouring properties, or even

within the same condominium, in order to ensure that it is at a "safe" entry price. When the perceived value to purchase is considered "safe", there is bound to be capital appreciation in the future. Usually, I will compare past trends of the intended purchase development versus its neighbouring projects, and even neighbouring districts. This has been my protocol in my property decision-making and it has worked out well, not only for myself but also for clients.

- Supply and demand: Look out for the number of units in total within the same location, and not the number of units in a development. If an area has limited condominiums but many HDB units, there will be demand from this pool of secondary buyers in the near future.
- Rental yield: Rental yield is dependent on the supply and demand of tenant pools, tenant profile type, and the type and size of the property.
- Market intelligence: It is a privilege to be part of an agency with a strong market research team. At ERA, the leaders always hold consumer and market intelligence seminars to let us into the latest property trends and the most updated investment strategies. With such insights, we are able to make more calculated decisions in property investment.



Q Are you planning to buy property in the next three to five years?

A My past few purchases have mostly been made based on capital gains while residing in them. I am planning to buy an investment unit, which will be a condominium in a good central location.

Of course, it must pass my stringent tests of identifying a good undervalued property. No matter how good the location or yield, it will still not be considered a good investment if it is overpriced. It is important to arm yourself with facts and knowledge to make a sound investment choice.

Q What's your view of the property market?

A In the mid to long term, the Singapore property market has lots of potential for growth, especially with the Government's initiatives to propel Singapore to be the No. 1 financial hub in Asia, the most liveable city, and so on.

There are mega projects in progress, such as the expansion of MRT lines, project Jewel at Changi Airport and port transformation, to take liveability in Singapore to the next level.

The recent cooling measures have also proven to be necessary for the property market to stay healthy and sustainable, and for prices to remain affordable for Singaporeans.

While local demand was curtailed for several months after the cooling

measures were rolled out, core central region transactions have remained encouraging.

From July to November last year, \$2 million-and-above buyers rose to 64 per cent, up from 50 per cent in 2017. Based on the latest URA figures, 2018 was the best year for core central region transactions above \$2,000 psf with close to \$10 billion sales volume.

Q What's your financing strategy?

A I am servicing a home loan pegged to the fixed deposit rate as it is relatively constant and doesn't fluctuate easily. Once the lock-in period is over, I would be looking at re-financing if the interest rates get lower.

I took a loan of 80 per cent of the purchase price of my apartment, and it comes with an interest rate of 1.6 per cent and a tenure of 24 years. I prefer to take up the maximum loan so that my funds are freed up for future investments. I can choose to do a partial repayment if interest rates rise. Also, it made sense to take advantage of the low interest rates then.

Q Do you have insurance cover for property and contents?

A I have insurance to fully cover the home contents as well as for the entire home loan.

Q What's your overall investing strategy?

A Only invest in instruments that you truly understand. For myself, I live and breathe real estate, so it is only natural that I invest only in real estate.

I invested in stocks and shares previously, but they didn't work out for me because I have absolutely no knowledge or the time to monitor them.

Q My dream home is...

A A penthouse on a very high floor with a beautiful sea and city view, as well as a big balcony for enjoying afternoon tea overlooking the sunset and the horizon. It should be in the city centre overlooking the Marina Bay Sands and Gardens by the Bay.

I would say my current home is my dream home, but in the future, I would love to have a bigger workspace, and more rooms for my kids to have their own music and reading rooms.

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Personalities born in the Year of the Pig



Jan Lee

The pig might be the last sign in the Chinese zodiac cycle, but it can hardly be considered the least.

Those born in the Year of the Pig are said to be easygoing, kind, honest, loyal and warm-hearted people who can show surprising focus and perseverance in achieving their goals.

On the flip side, they can be overly trusting, naïve, gullible and hot-tempered.

Laziness is often also held up as a potentially negative trait.

How well do these traits hold up for those born in the Year of the Pig?

1

LEE KUAN YEW (1923-2015)
There is no doubt the late Mr Lee showed perseverance and focus in building a modern Singapore.

But he was more intimidating than easygoing. He was known for being a stern leader who did not hesitate to cross swords with those he did not agree with.

In one of his most famous quotes, the founding father of modern Singapore said: "Between being loved and being feared, I have always believed (Italian philosopher) Machiavelli was right. If nobody is afraid of me, I'm meaningless."

Mr Lee did not have a lazy bone in his body. He retired from the Cabinet only at the age of 87 and continued to attend the annual Chinese New Year dinner in his constituency of Tanjong Pagar until two years before his death, at 91.



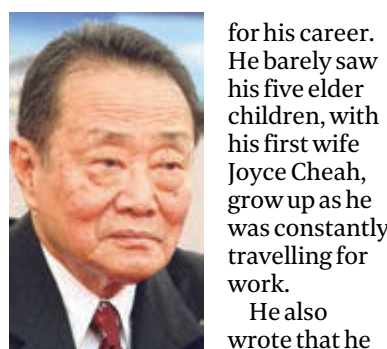
2

ROBERT KUOK (1923)
The Malaysian-Chinese business magnate and billionaire is the epitome of the self-made man.

Coming from a family with an abusive and often absent father, he eventually started the Shangri-La hotel chain and became Malaysia's richest man.

He also holds a stake in Wilmar International – the world's largest palm oil processor.

Mr Kuok recounted in his memoir that he had to sacrifice family time



for his career. He barely saw his five elder children, with his first wife Joyce Cheah, grow up as he was constantly travelling for work.

He also wrote that he would make a

very bad enemy as he takes insults very much to heart and the "strong anger" felt towards naysayers propelled him in life.

3

SANDRA OH (left, 1971)

The Korean-American actress may have left the long-running medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* (2005 to present) – after 10 seasons as the ambitious Dr Cristina Yang – but her co-stars continue to speak highly of her.

Actress Ellen Pompeo called her talent "otherworldly" when *Killing Eve* (2018 to present) premiered. Oh won a Golden Globe for Best Actress – Television Series Drama for her

role as an intelligence officer.

Kevin McKidd, who played Oh's love interest in *Grey's Anatomy*, said he teased up after her win and was "really proud" of her for hosting the awards show as well.

Given what others say, it seems that Oh is truly a warm-hearted and talented woman who gets along well with those around her – embodying some of the best qualities of those born under the sign of the pig.



4

KIM HEE-CHUL (1983)

Kim, from popular boyband Super Junior, is open and honest, even about intimate details of his life.

While most K-pop idols would carefully project a wholesome and cheery image, the 35-year-old shared his struggle with hair loss on a variety programme last year.

And by his own admission, he also gets angry easily. He and Super Junior's leader Lee Teuk (also born in 1983) once had a huge fight – which took around 20 people to break up – while backstage at a music festival in Incheon.

It is this willingness to be genuine and show his insecurities and weaknesses that fans love about Kim.



Pigs are not always objects of scorn and ridicule, but are actually much prized by the Chinese. And if past examples show, the Year of the Pig is one that can be very exciting



Ho Ai Li

In the world of Chinese fiction, the most famous pig character is Zhu Bajie from the Ming Dynasty novel, *Journey To The West*, who embodies traits such as gluttony, lasciviousness and, well, pig-headedness.

And in the waning days of China's last imperial dynasty, the Qing, Chinese labourers shipped off to places like South-east Asia were also called *zhu zai* (piglets), as the cramped ships resembled pig pens.

Today, the Chinese have long thrown off the yoke of Manchu rule and kissed their piglets goodbye. But pigs are still associated with boars – *ti-ko* (literally brother pig in Minnan dialect) means a lecherous man, while *xian zhushou*, or salty pig trotters, is a piquant phrase for groping hands.

To be fair, pigs are not always objects of scorn and ridicule, but are actually much prized by the Chinese.

And this being the Year of the Pig, these animals can finally lift their snouts up and hog the limelight.

Love them or hate them, pigs are at the centre of Chinese culture.

It may be difficult for many people to imagine – especially in Singapore where pig farms have been phased out since the late 1980s – but ancient Chinese believed that a home was not a home without a pig.

For centuries, pigs were so commonly reared in China that the Chinese word for home (*jia*) is made up of what looks like a roof over a pig.

In contrast, put a roof-like symbol over the character for the ox and you get not a home but a goal (*lao*).

Some archaeologists in China have found statues of figures with the head of a pig and the body of a dragon, underlining how pigs enjoyed as good a standing as the much-loved dragon among the Chinese.

The laidback creature may be the last of the 12 Chinese zodiac animals, but is ahead of the ox, goat and horse in being one of the earliest animals domesticated by the Chinese.

Pigs are popular as they are not fussy – they do not need much space for grazing, unlike goats or horses, and can be fed leftovers.

Unlike the beasts of burden, pigs are kept mainly as a source of meat.

Pork is also a luxury in lean times. Dr Ngiam Tong Tau, former chief executive of the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority, recalled at a 2016 talk that his family kept two to three pigs in 1940s and 1950s Singapore, not for their own consumption but to be fattened up and sold during Chinese New Year.

"We collected food waste from the neighbourhood and cooked them as swill for feeding the pigs," he said.

While the consumption of pork is prohibited under Islam and Judaism, the Chinese tend to have pork as the main meat offering for rituals during special occasions such as weddings – think roast suckling pig.

In Korea, which is influenced by Chinese culture, pigs bring riches. Professor Kim Jong-dae, who studies folk culture at Chung-Ang

University, told The Korea Times: "People buy lottery tickets when they have dreams of the pig."

He added: "As pigs are considered lucky, holding a pig is a good sign in dream reading, while a pig running away from home is regarded as ominous."

In China, pigs are also a symbol of wealth. For instance, in Chinese, to distribute the pork (*fen zhu rou*) is to divvy up the spoils.

And now that the Chinese have become richer, more can afford to eat dishes like dongpo rou, the three-layer pork that melts in the mouth.

In 1991, the Chinese ate an average of slightly more than 20kg of meat per capita a year.

In 2017, the amount was 50kg, China's *Caixin* magazine reported, citing data from the United Nations and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Pork

makes up the bulk of the meat.

Pork is such a big part of Chinese lives that China created a strategic pork reserve in 2007 – also a Year of the Pig – to stockpile live and frozen pork to stabilise prices.

For the Chinese, pigs also symbolise fecundity. Some jewellery shops in Chinatown here, for example, sell bridal necklaces with pendants featuring a sow and her piglets.

In Singapore, at least two families which ran pig farms have gone on to start major supermarket chains here, namely the Lims behind Sheng Siong and the Tan family of Prime Supermarket.

Two outstanding men of Chinese descent in South-east Asia – Singapore's late founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysian tycoon Robert Kuok – were born in the Year of the Pig, in 1923.

Asked if this had made them stubborn in a Straits Times interview in 2015, Mr Kuok replied: "Greedy. See food, eat. See power, grab."

So, would there be much riches up for grabs in the upcoming Year of the Pig?

For the property market here, the last three pig years were fat years, Chinese daily *Lianhe Zaobao* reported last Sunday, but cooling measures introduced last year are making analysts feel less than bullish.

Certainly, expectations are more down to earth for the upcoming Year of the Earth Pig.

In any case, the most earth-shattering Year of the Pig in the modern era is 1911, the year when revolutionaries brought an end to dynastic rule in China and pigtailed.

Happy Year of the Pig and have fun crafting your own pig tales this year.

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For centuries, pigs were so commonly reared in China that the Chinese word for home (*jia*) is made up of what looks like a roof over a pig. In contrast, put a roof-like symbol over the character for the ox and you get not a home but a goal (*lao*).

5

JOSEPH SCHOOLING (1995)
The pig may have come in last in the Chinese zodiac race, but this Pig is quick off the blocks.

Schooling won Singapore's first Olympic gold medal in 2016 in the 100m butterfly.

It has not been an easy journey as he had to go through lonely years of training overseas. And in 2012, during the London Olympics, moments before his 200m fly heats, his caps and goggles were deemed to have flouted competition rules. Thrown off by the incident, he failed to perform.

But he persevered and worked through the disappointment to set two national records at the 2013 World Championships, clinch a silver at the 2014 Commonwealth Games and sweep nine golds from nine events in 2015 at the Southeast Asian Games.

He is not one to be easily swayed from achieving his goals.



6

HEBETIEN (1983)
Tien is seen as the most reserved member of Taiwanese girl group S.H.E.

Beside the bubbly Selina Jen and the funny Ella Chen, she is relatively quiet.

But that does not mean Tien

is meek. The star is fiercely protective of her privacy and has taken to task reporters who cross the line and pry.

At the same time, the 35-year-old, who has carved out a successful solo singing career, remains loyal to the group. Tien once said that even a typhoon would not break apart S.H.E.



7

TIN PEI LING (1983)
Member of Parliament Tin

might have been somewhat naïve when it came to social media

when she started out in politics, but she has learnt to let her

work speak for itself.

Some eight

years on, she is known as a hardworking politician, one who made house visits right up to the week before delivery when she was pregnant with her first child.

She also successfully contested for the MacPherson ward as a solo candidate in 2015 after gaining support from residents with schemes she introduced, such as the MacPherson Care Fund to help elderly residents cope with medical bills; and a milk powder scheme for low-income families with young children.



8

HOU HSIAO-HSIEN (1947)
One could say that the award-winning film director, one of the pioneers of Taiwanese cinema's New Wave movement, is pig-headed.

Hou is a film-maker who does not bow to political pressures. His 1989 film, *A City Of Sadness*, was the first to reflect the sensitive Feb 28 anti-government uprising, in which thousands of people were massacred.

But staying true to his course has paid off.

While his period action film *The Assassin* (2015) did not do well at the box office, it was critically acclaimed and he was named best director at the Cannes Film Festival and the Golden Horse Awards.



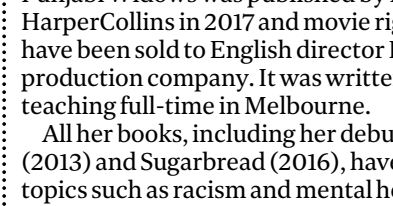
9

FANN WONG (1971)
Fann, the first local actress to venture to Hollywood with *Shanghai Knights* (2003), has gotten flak in the past for things she said.

When she won her first best actress award at the 1995 Star Awards, she candidly remarked, "What should I win next year?", causing an uproar over her perceived arrogance.

But the 48-year-old, who is married to actor Christopher Lee and has a son Zed, said her remarks were the result of immaturity and naivety – she had not yet learnt how to express her feelings and communicate with audiences.

That was merely a bump on the road to enduring stardom and she remains an undisputed queen of the local entertainment scene.



10

BALLI KAUR JASWAL (1983)

Novelist Jaswal's acclaimed novel *Erotic Stories For Punjabi Widows* was published by international brand HarperCollins in 2017 and movie rights for the book have been sold to English director Ridley Scott's production company. It was written while she was teaching full-time in Melbourne.

All her books, including her debut novel *Inheritance* (2013) and *Sugarbread* (2016), have tackled tough topics such as racism and mental health. She has also spoken up on the racism she has faced as a South Asian in Singapore. This is no pushover Pig.



11

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BRIGHT EYES⁺

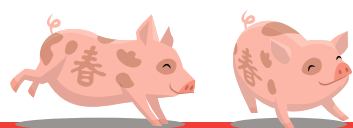
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Hogging the limelight

As the Year of the Pig draws near, The Sunday Times looks at the enduring appeal of 10 famous hogs in popular culture



Venessa Lee



Peppa Pig

Peppa Pig is proof of the power of the early-years crowd. Launched in 2004, the ongoing British cartoon series features the adventures of the eponymous heroine, her younger brother and their parents.

The show has spawned an everflowing river of toys, hats, books, water bottles as well as a theme park in England.

The porcine household's appeal stems from a faithful representation of pre-school issues. Peppa's routine largely revolves around playing games, school, family outings and jumping in muddy puddles, although, this being TV-land, she has met the Queen on occasion.

Parental moralising is refreshingly absent. The adults are resigned to the fact that Peppa's toddler brother George will only willingly eat vegetables if they are in the shape of a dinosaur. And Peppa often calls Daddy Pig "silly Daddy" for his bungling ways.

Broadcast in more than 180 territories, the show airs in Singapore on Nickelodeon (StarHub TV Channel 314, Singtel TV Channel 240) at 7am on weekdays, and 10am and 12.30pm on weekends. Peppa Pig Lunar New Year Special premieres on the same channel on Tuesday at 7am.

There is also Peppa Celebrates Chinese New Year, a Chinese-language film mixing live action and animation which opens on Thursday.



Charlotte's Web was spun into a movie in 2006.

Wilbur from Charlotte's Web

Wilbur is another well-loved pig in children's literature and film.

In Charlotte's Web (1952), written by American author E.B. White, Wilbur is due for the slaughterhouse.

Charlotte the spider intervenes by weaving messages lauding Wilbur in her web, in a bid to persuade the farmer that the pig is too valuable to be turned into bacon.

Wilbur's lack of ego is one of his nicest qualities. When Charlotte spins the words "Some Pig" in her web, he tries to look the part. He does not know that his considerate and modest nature makes him special in his own right.



Babe

Babe (1995, above) was an unlikely sleeper hit that was nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards.

The movie features an orphaned piglet, Babe, who is adopted by a sheepdog and learns to herd sheep to avoid being butchered.

This gentle, poignant film about a "sheep-pig" is boosted by the growing bond between human and hog. Farmer Hoggett's laconic words of praise for Babe at the end, "That'll do, pig, that'll do", have become a cinema classic.

PHOTOS: DISNEY, FACEBOOK, PEPPA PIG/FACEBOOK, SHAW ORGANISATION, THE COLLECTIVE EFFORT, UIP, YOUTUBE



Miss Piggy

At 43, a respectable vintage for a Muppet, Miss Piggy has aged like fine wine. Or as she puts it: "With several bottles of wine, almost anyone can look absolutely gorgeous!"

Miss Piggy, you see, is always in on the joke. With her platinum-blond hair and what looks like double sets of false eyelashes, she is a straight-talking diva in the mould of singer Dolly Parton. She also does a mean karate chop on people who annoy her.

Since appearing onscreen in The Muppet Show (1976 to 1981), Miss Piggy has captured hearts, most notably, Kermit the Frog's. Her 40-year, on-off relationship with Kermit, a fellow Muppet icon, is currently in hibernation.

She is a feminist role model because she is perfectly happy in her own skin. As she tweeted at the start of 2019: "New Year, New Moi? HA!! As if. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, sweetie."



The Monkey King 2 (2016) starring Xiao Shenyang as Zhu Bajie.

Zhu Bajie

Zhu Bajie is the pig-faced character in the 16th-century Chinese literary classic, Journey To The West, which depicts how the monk Tang Xuanzang travelled to India to obtain Buddhist scriptures.

Beset by monsters and demons during his pilgrimage, Xuanzang is protected by his companions: Zhu Bajie, or Pigsy; Sun Wukong, or the Monkey King; Sha Wujing, or Sandy; and a dragon prince who takes the form of the white horse the monk rides on.

An earthy soul, Zhu Bajie's deeds of valour are marred by his weakness for food and comely maidens. In Chinese, zhu means pig and bajie refers to the eight precepts that Buddhists follow on observance days and festivals.

The well-loved tale has been recounted in numerous television and film productions.



Spider-Pig

For many fans, Plopper the pig was the breakout star of The Simpsons Movie (2007), the film of the popular animation television series, The Simpsons (1989 to present).

Homer Simpson adopts Plopper and holds the pig upside down, making him walk on the ceiling, while singing "Spider-Pig", a parody of the Spider-Man theme song.

With lines such as, "Can he swing from a web?/No, he can't, he's a pig", the song was an instant hit.



McDull

McDull, a young piglet raised by a single parent, is the brainchild of Hong Kong cartoonist couple Alice Mak and Brian Tse.

Determined and sweet-natured, the popular Cantonese-speaking cartoon character starred in his first feature film, My Life As McDull, in 2001.

His mother adds to his appeal. A busy working mum preoccupied with stereotypical Asian concerns such as academic performance, she has been known to drill McDull during "English time" at home.



Pink Piglet and his friends at Hundred Acre Wood.

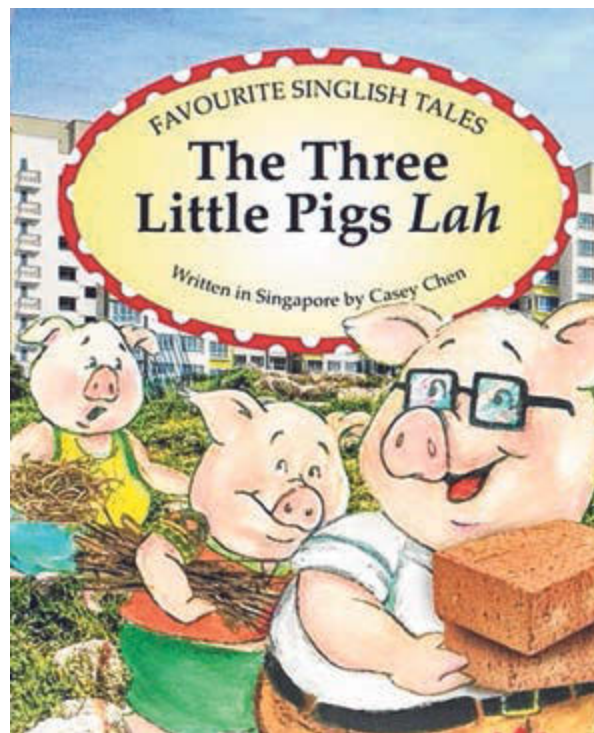
Piglet

Piglet first appeared in British author A.A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh books in 1926.

Like the rest of Pooh bear's gang of friends at Hundred Acre Wood, he has since appeared in movies and on television.

Afraid of strange sounds, rain, being alone and many other things, Piglet speaks to the child in all of us. Yet this "Very Small Animal" can be brave. He once helped rescue Pooh and Owl when they were trapped.

Piglet is also known for his loyalty. When Pooh says he does not "feel very much like Pooh", Piglet, his BFF (Best Friend Forever), brings him tea and honey until he does.



The Three Little Pigs

With singsong cadences invoking "chinny chin chins" and a huffing and puffing wolf, The Three Little Pigs bridges the gap between nursery rhymes and proper stories.

Probably one of the first fairy tales read to many a youngster, pundits say it teaches lessons that will last till adulthood. One, it is worth investing in quality materials for infrastructure projects. Two, family matters – even if your work-shy siblings probably do not deserve to be bailed out.

There is even a Singlish version. The Three Little Pigs Lah (2013, above) was penned by author Casey Chen.



Porky Pig

The iconic Porky Pig made his debut in 1935. The world's most famous stutterer, the meek and mild pig features in many Looney Tunes cartoons as a foil for over-the-top characters like Daffy Duck.

Instead of proclaiming "The End" after the show, he bursts through the head of a bass drum, saying: "Th-Th-The, Th-Th-The, Th-Th... That's all, folks!"

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1 Entertainment One



2 Singlish Mamashop



3 DBS Bank



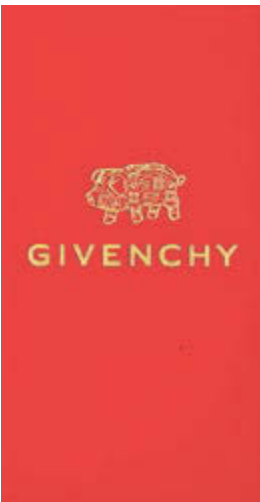
4 Chubby Chubby



5 Omega



6 Manulife US REIT



7 Givenchy



8 Ad Planet Group



9 Credit Suisse



10 KPMG



11 Audemars Piguet



12 Bulgari



13 Disney



14 Hotel Jen Tanglin Singapore



15 ePrism



16 Singapore Management University



17 Grab

The hongbao quiz

Desiree Loh

Cashless hongbao seem to be gaining traction this Chinese New Year, with various banks offering e-hongbao services.

But physical hongbao are far from becoming obsolete.

In fact, some organisations have found ways to straddle innovation and tradition, with technology embedded in their hongbao in the form of augmented reality or QR codes that lead to interactive activities.

For example, scanning Hotel Jen Tanglin Singapore's bird-adorned hongbao with the HP Reveal app results in the birds coming "alive" – flapping their wings in a digital animation.

The Year of the Pig has also inspired various artistic renditions of the animal, ranging from modern geometric interpretations to cute cartoons.

At the same time, others have opted for less specific hongbao designs that can be used for other festive occasions.

Feast your eyes on this year's designs and have fun answering these questions:

- Which are from banks?
- Which can be bought in shops?
- How many designs include pigs?
- Which have technology embedded?
- How many designs include fish?

ANSWERS 1: 3, 9, 23, 33 and 37 2: 2, 15 and 17 3: 14 designs - 1, 5, 7, 8, 9, 16, 18, 21, 25, 27, 29, 32, 33 and 34 4: 19, 20, 21, 27 and 34 5: 4 designs - 4, 15, 31 and 37



18 Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth



19 Schroders



20 F&N



21 Great Eastern



22 Cartier



23 Marina Bay Sands



24 Hermes



25 Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre



26 Singtel



27 Marina Square



28 Citibank



29 Parkway Pantai

Prosperity foods

Yusheng gets porky

This fish salad uses bak kwa, crispy bak kwa, prosciutto ham, pork floss and pork crackling for the Year of the Pig



Hedy Khoo
STFood Online Editor

I am not one for art and craft, but if I can arrange this cutesy-looking yusheng featuring five types of pork items – complete with a pig motif and a picket fence fashioned from bak kwa – I am quite sure anyone can.

Every Chinese New Year, I enjoy assembling my own yusheng, but this is the first time I have attempted making one inspired by the year's zodiac animal.

To fit the Year of the Pig theme, I used bak kwa, crispy bak kwa, pork floss, pork crackling and prosciutto ham. The use of different pork prod-

ucts adds to the texture of the dish, which my colleague named Auspicious Yusheng.

The crispy bak kwa replaces pok chui (deep-fried flour crackers), which symbolises gold and are found in traditional yusheng. Toss them back in if you are a stickler for tradition or fear losing out on wealth in the new year.

But what is yusheng without fish (yu in Chinese)?

Yu is also the homophone for the Chinese character for abundance. The auspicious Chinese phrase, nian nian you yu (having abundance every year), is said during the tossing ritual of lo hei.

Enter baby abalone (bao yu in Chinese). You do not have to go the whole hog and splash out on high-end abalone. A can of farmed baby abalone of reasonable quality can be bought for under \$25.

What I like about baby abalone is you can skip slicing them as they are already small-sized. They also look like little gold ingots, giving a huge feel to the yusheng platter.

You can easily buy ingredients for yusheng, such as the preserved melon strips, preserved ginger and candied orange peel, in ready-to-use sets.

The first time I made yusheng at home, I shredded the radishes and carrots myself. But with shredded

radish and carrot available in supermarkets during the Chinese New Year season, there is no reason to work yourself to the bone shredding vegetables that then need to be soaked in ice water and dried.

Even with ready-to-use ingredients, it takes some effort to assemble them.

While arranging the shredded carrot on the plate, I was dismayed when it looked more bear than hog at first.

Patience and persistence are required. It can get a little frustrating with the shredded carrot and radish sticking out at the edges, but you can easily trim away the stray ends.

I don't usually have the patience for arranging food into animal motifs and I am not one to prepare cute-looking food. I assembled my platter with the help of scissors, a spoon and a pair of chopsticks.

If your pig motif does not turn out looking like the animal, do not let it spoil your festive mood.

At the very least, you can enjoy a good laugh with your family while still having fun tossing and eating the salad.

Happy feasting!

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ST PHOTO: HEDY KHOO

Top 5: Nian gao

Rise and shine with this rice cake



Wong Ah Yoke
Senior Food Correspondent

For many Chinese families, nian gao is a must during Chinese New Year. The Chinese name for the sticky rice cake, made traditionally from glutinous rice flour and brown sugar, literally means "year cake" but is also a homonym for "higher year" – in other words, a better year ahead.

For Taoists, it has another significance.

I remember my mother offering nian gao to the Kitchen God a week before Chinese New Year because the deity is believed to depart for heaven on that day to report on what he has observed happening in the household the past year.

The sticky cake supposedly seals his lips so he cannot say anything bad about the family, only sweet things. These days, you can find many versions of nian gao. Some are made with coconut milk and do not keep well.

But old-fashioned nian gao can keep for months. It can be eaten pan-fried on its own, or sandwiched between slices of sweet potato and yam and dipped in batter. Or steamed and rolled in grated coconut.

Because I can eat only one or two small slices at a time, I prefer to have it in restaurants during the Chinese New Year, when it is served as dessert.

A number of restaurants also come up with novel recipes to make it more interesting.

For 2019, these are the best I tasted, in no particular order.

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1. ETERNAL BLISS PLATTER

Where: Select Crystal Jade outlets, go to estore.crystaljade.com

When: Crystal by Feb 19

This comes as a combo of five savoury and sweet cakes. The red date coconut cake is the standout here. Though not a traditional nian gao – that is in the combo too – this

looks like one.

The taste of red dates is obvious, but adding coconut milk gives it a totally new character and makes it more like an aromatic nonya kueh. The other flavours in the pack are carrot cake, yam cake and osmanthus chrysanthemum cake. These are pretty good too.

The platter costs \$38.80 and you need to order three days in advance.



PHOTOS: BLUE LOTUS, TUNGLOK GROUP, MIN JIANG AT GOODWOOD PARK HOTEL, CRYSTAL JADE, FULLERTON HOTEL

4. NIAN GAO GOODIES

Where: Blue Lotus outlets at Sentosa Cove, Tanjong Pagar Centre, Stevens Road and Alexandra Road. Go to www.bluelotus.com.sg/chinese-new-year-2019/

When: Until Feb 19

The goodies are a set of four sweet and savoury Chinese New Year cakes packaged in a pretty four-tier tingkat carrier.

For \$38, you get carrot cake, yam cake and two types of nian gao – traditional and red date.

Like the platter from Crystal Jade, the red date flavour is the standout, as the dates have a distinctive flavour that I like.

But this does not have coconut milk and tastes more like a traditional Chinese sweet cake. It is not too sweet though.

The two nian gao are best eaten by cutting them into thick slices and pan-frying them with a little oil.

The savoury cakes just need to be steamed briefly to heat them up.



2. DEEP-FRIED CHEMAPEK

Where: Min Jiang, Goodwood Park Hotel, 22 Scotts Road, tel: 6730-1704

Open: 11.30am to 2.30pm (Mondays to Saturdays), 11am to 2.30pm (Sundays), 6.30 to 10.30pm (Sundays)

This looks like chempedak goreng and not nian gao. But buried inside that crispy, golden nugget is a dollop of nian gao.

I like that the chempedak is blended into a paste, so that while you get the full flavour of the fruit, you can also bite through the nian gao easily. It's almost impossible to bite through chempedak flesh otherwise. It's available only for dine-in, as you have to eat it freshly fried.

The restaurant also offers a Chilled Durian "Nian Gao" Roll and a Pan-fried Yam And Pumpkin "Nian Gao", which are good too. The trio costs \$32 for nine pieces, \$42 for 12 pieces and \$52 for 15 pieces.



3. TUNGLOK NIAN GAO

Where: Available at all Tung Lok outlets except Tong Le Private Dining, Ruyi – Chinese Fast Food, Dancing Crab and Slappy Cakes, tel: 6337-2055 (for bulk orders)

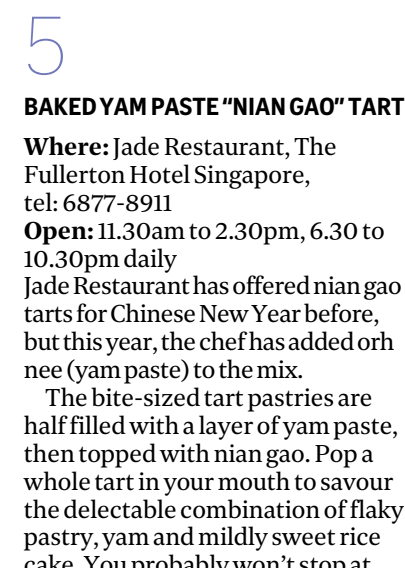
Open: Various timings, go to www.tunglok.com for details

This comes in a set of four flavours – traditional, pandan, black sesame and red dates – at \$22 a box.

My favourite is the traditional one because the caramelised sugar is much more fragrant than what you get in most nian gao.

It is also not very sweet and is recognised by the Health Promotion Board for its lower sugar content.

Just cut into slices and pan fry till the outside gets slightly crisp. Serve warm.



5. BAKED YAM PASTE "NIAN GAO" TART

Where: Jade Restaurant, The Fullerton Hotel Singapore, tel: 6877-8911

Open: 11.30am to 2.30pm, 6.30 to 10.30pm daily

Jade Restaurant has offered nian gao tarts for Chinese New Year before, but this year, the chef has added orh nee (yam paste) to the mix.

The bite-sized tart pastries are half filled with a layer of yam paste, then topped with nian gao. Pop a whole tart in your mouth to savour the delectable combination of flaky pastry, yam and mildly sweet rice cake. You probably won't stop at one.

They cost \$7 a pair for dine-in and \$30 nett for a box of nine for takeaway.

Gold class



Eunice Quek
Food Correspondent

Go on a gilt trip this Chinese New Year, as everything from roast suckling pig to yusheng is getting touched by gold – edible gold, that is.

This form of gold comes in powder, flakes or sheets from places like Italy, France, or Japan's Kanazawa city.

The precious metal is flavourless and is used to jazz up a dish or drink aesthetically.

It is chemically inert, and passes through the body without being absorbed into the bloodstream, says Ms Tan Ling Ai, 60, a nutritionist and founder of health consultancy 5Color Diet.

The "safe grade" for edible gold ranges from 22 to 24 carats, and those with a lower carat value have "more impurities and are less safe to eat", she adds.

"Ancient records show that more than 5,000 years ago, Egyptians believed gold could cure physical, mental and spiritual ailments," says Ms Tan.

The Romans also used gold preparations to treat skin lesions and sores. And in ancient Chinese medicine, gold was the secret to youthful skin, she adds.

"However, in Chinese medicine, edible gold has 'warm energy' and should be taken in moderation for those who have a 'heaty' body," Culinarly speaking, Ms Fukuda Eiko, senior office manager of Watanabe Coffee, says care is needed when using gold leaves on food as it is "very fragile" and easily affected by static electricity.

The cafe uses bamboo tongs to wrap gold leaves around its soft serve ice cream. It also sells edible gold flakes and sprinkles, and even key chains filled with edible gold.

The Sunday Times rounds up eight places with that Midas touch.

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EDIBLE GOLD FLAKES, ABALONE AND FLORENTINE COOKIES

What: One of the most eye-catching booths at the Chinese New Year fair at Takashimaya Square offers Tasmanian abalone covered with a sheet of gold leaf, along with edible

gold flakes (from \$32) to be used as garnish for food.

Or jazz up your lohei with disposable chopsticks covered in gold foil (\$18, above) – when you pull the chopsticks apart, the gold flakes are supposed to cascade onto



QUEEN'S YUSHENG

What: The Queen's Yusheng from Antoinette patisserie comes in an egg painted with Italian gold powder and sits on a nest of gold-covered chocolates, almonds, cashews, mandarin orange butter cake, yam and sweet potato chips. Crack the egg to reveal diced and shredded pineapple, Thai green mango, red dragon fruit and pomelo. Drizzle the dressing of mandarin orange, plum sauce and gula melaka before tossing.

Where: Antoinette, 30 Penhas Road or 02-33/34 Mandarin Road, 333A Orchard Road

When: Till Feb 19 or while stocks last. Go to its website for opening hours

Info: www.antoINETTE.com.sg



PREMIUM GOLDEN CHOCOLATE BROWNIE

What: This rich golden chocolate brownie (\$29) launched by new local gift and souvenir brand Reborn and baked by home-grown bakery Food Fresh is topped with gold leaf from Ishikawa prefecture, and is best sliced when cold.

Other prospects rolled out by the brand include key chains filled with gold flakes (\$10 or \$15), a gold leaf case (\$28) and gold leaf sprinkles (\$20). There are plans for different flavours of brownie, along with tea bags with gold flakes.

Where: Reborn booths at Marina Square Atrium Chinese New Year fair and Tangs at Tang Plaza, Basement 1

When: Till today (Marina Square), ongoing (Tangs Plaza) – both open from 10am to 10pm

Info: www.facebook.com/rebornsingapore

AUSPICIOUS YUSHENG

INGREDIENTS

150g red carrot, shredded
110g green radish, shredded
40g white radish, shredded
20g preserved melon strip (white)
20g preserved melon strips (brown)
100g bak kwa, (cut into 5.5cm by 1cm pieces)
1 baby tomato, halved
70g sliced prosciutto (roll up each slice)
20g preserved melon strips (green)
40g pork crackling
20g preserved ginger (pale yellow)
20g preserved melon strips (light green)
2 segments of pomelo (130g)
1 lime, halved
20g preserved ginger (red)
120g baby abalone
30g crispy bak kwa
30g crushed peanuts
40g candied orange peel
25g toasted sesame seeds
150ml yusheng sauce
120ml rice bran oil
Pinch of pepper
Pinch of cinnamon powder

You will need a plate with a diameter of 20cm.

METHOD

1. Roll the shredded carrot into a ball and place on the plate. Shape the white shredded radish into the ears of the pig. Use scissors to trim the stray strands of carrot or radish that stick out.
2. Spoon the crushed peanuts around the edges of the plate.
2. Take a few strands of white preserved melon strips, twirl them around the tip of a pair of chopsticks and place them as the whites of the pig's eyes.
3. Do the same with brown preserved melon strips, which form the eyes.
4. Take a strip of white radish and lay it out in the shape of a snout.

5. Slice two 1cm pieces from one piece of rolled-up prosciutto ham. Place these as the nostrils within the snout.
6. Take a strip of bak kwa, bend it slightly and place this on the carrot as the mouth.
7. Arrange the green radish to form a "grass patch" below the pig.
8. Place the tomato halves below the pig.
9. Place the bak kwa strips on top of the green radish to form a picket fence.
10. Arrange the rolled-up prosciutto as "tree trunks" around the pig.
11. Arrange the green preserved melon strips above the prosciutto so they look like trees.
12. Lay the pork crackling above the pig.
13. Put the preserved ginger (pale yellow) next to the ears.
14. Place the light green preserved melon strips around the green preserved melon strips.
15. Put the remaining brown preserved melon strips around the base of each prosciutto tree.
16. Lay each segment of the pomelo on either side of the pig.
17. Place the halved limes under the pig's chin.
18. Leave the remaining white preserved melon strips and red preserved ginger on the left side of the plate.
19. Arrange the baby abalone in the space beside the prosciutto trees.
20. Place the crispy bak kwa at the base of the bak kwa fence.
21. Spoon the crushed peanuts around the edges of the plate.
22. Spoon the candied orange peel above the pig head and around the edges of the plate.
23. Scatter the toasted sesame seeds around the candied orange peel.
24. Add pork floss over the crispy bak kwa.
25. Serve with yusheng sauce, oil, pepper and cinnamon powder on the side.

Serves eight to 10 people



SCAN TO WATCH

See how Hedy Khoo makes Auspicious Yusheng.



Follow Straits Times Food on Instagram @straitstimes-food. If you try out this recipe, take a photo and share it on Instagram. Use the hashtag #straitstimes-food, mention and tag @straitstimes-food in your post.

GOLD SOFT SERVE

What: Watanabe Coffee's Hokkaido soft serve gets the luxe treatment with a sheet of gold leaf wrapped around the ice cream.

For the best of both worlds, get the milk and matcha mixed flavour (\$12.80).

For Chinese New Year (till Feb 19), order the Gold Gateau Chocolat Specialite (\$88), in which chocolate cake is topped with gold leaf.

Other products which use the same gold leaf from Kanazawa city, Ishikawa prefecture, are available at the cafe, including key chains (\$10 or \$15) and gold leaf sprinkles (\$20).

Where: Watanabe Coffee, 01-00 Isetan Scotts, Shaw House, 350 Orchard Road

When: 8am to 10pm (Sundays to



Thursdays), 8am to 11pm (Fridays, Saturdays and eve of public holidays)
Info: Call 6235-0608 or order Gold Gateau Chocolat Specialite two days in advance at w-coffee.asia



KITAOKA SAKURA SARASARA LIQUEUR

What: This special edition sweet liqueur (\$22.90 for 180ml) includes gold flakes and edible cherry blossoms. It is produced by Kitaoka Honten brewery in Yoshino, Nara prefecture, one of Japan's famous sakura spots.

Info: Order at redmart.com



KALEIDOSCOPE OF PROSPERITY – SHUNDE-STYLE YUSHENG

What: In this Cantonese Shunde-style yusheng at Yan restaurant, crispy fried vermicelli is topped with 22-carat gold leaf, and surrounded by vegetables, sesame seeds, crispy youtiao (fried dough fritters), as well as sliced fresh salmon or yellow tail. There are also chef Gualtiero Marchesi's.

The yusheng is part of the \$278++ a person set menu (minimum eight to 10 diners, order one day in advance), and \$138 on the a la carte menu (tomorrow to Feb 19, order one day in advance).

Where: Zafferano, Ocean Financial Centre, 10 Collyer Quay, Level 43

When: Till Feb 19, 11.30am to 2.30pm, 6 to 10.30pm till late

Info: Call 6384-5585 or e-mail reserve@Yan.com.sg



GOLDEN ROAST SUCKLING PIG AND GOLDEN DUCK

What: The Golden Roast Suckling Pig (\$298) by roast meat specialist Kam's Roast is topped with 22-carat edible French gold flakes. Not to be outshone, its signature roast duck also gets the gold treatment (\$88).

Where: Kam's Roast, 01-04 Pacific Plaza, 9 Scotts Road

When: Till Feb 19, 11am to 10pm (weekdays), 10.30am to 10pm (weekends), Tomorrow, 10am to 4pm (for collection of pre-paid takeaway), 11am to 3pm (dine-in); closed on Tuesday

Info: Call 6836-7788 or order at cho.pe/kanstakeaway

Carnival cheer

Go on heart-stopping rides, become a human claw machine and meet top street performers at these whimsical wonderlands



Benson Ang
Lifestyle Correspondent

In recent years, more carnivals and funfairs have been popping up on Singapore's shores. And the more successful ones have been getting bigger and better and drawing larger crowds.

After all, what is not to like? They often offer thrilling rides, fun games, family-friendly activities, attractive prizes and a wide variety of bites. And for many Singaporeans, these attractions bring back fond childhood memories.

At least six carnivals are taking place these two months and experts attribute their growing popularity to their mass, family-friendly appeal.

The largest is the ongoing Prudential Marina Bay Carnival, which is spread over more than 23,000 sq m – the size of four football fields – at Bayfront Event Space.

Another event, Toybox Powered by Hasbro, opened last Friday at Sentosa and is banking on famous brands by the American toy giant, such as Transformers, Cluedo and My Little Pony, to draw the crowds. While most of the carnivals are in

town, Kindness Carnival is set up at an open field outside Beauty World MRT station. It is organised by established home-grown travelling funfair operator Uncle Ringo.

Its carnival director Joyce Lee, 35, says: "Experiencing a carnival is more fun than going to a mall or visiting cookie-cutter shops."

"I believe there is a little magic in the carnival atmosphere that lets people bond in a different way."

It is a sentiment shared by engineer Lau Kia Heng, 31, who attended a media preview of Toybox last Thursday with his wife, financial adviser Sabrina Seah, 29.

"Carnivals are fun and a good opportunity to spend time together as a couple," he says.

Mr Samuel Tan, course manager for the diploma in retail management at the Temasek Polytechnic School of Business, says: "There is usually something for everyone – be it heart-stopping rides for the adventurous, the romantic Star Flyer (a ride at the Prudential Marina Bay Carnival) for couples, family fun games, food or prizes."

But what makes a carnival successful? Ms Winnie Quek, a lecturer from Nanyang Polytechnic's School of Business Management, says it has to be unique and the admission rate must be reasonably priced.

"It should (also) not stretch over too many days due to the small market in Singapore."

A few carnivals, she notes, were cancelled because of poor take-up rate, low turnout, high operating costs and poor locations.

"Instead of focusing only on locals, carnivals can also reach out to tourists," she adds.

bang@sph.com.sg



Swim and slide through a mega ball pit (left) and get strapped into a human claw machine to grab toys and prizes (right) at the Toybox. Powered By Hasbro carnival in Sentosa. ST PHOTOS: JASMINE CHONG



Toybox Powered By Hasbro

Where: Palawan Green, Sentosa

When: Until Feb 17, 10am to 10pm daily (last entry at 9.30pm), closed on Feb 11 for maintenance

Admission: Credits for games, activities, food and beverages can be purchased on site or online. A wristband, which allows for a single-day entry with 17 credits, costs \$20

Info: toyboxsingapore.com

Hasbro's first multi-brand carnival in Asia features seven popular brands by the American toy giant – Transformers, My Little Pony, Nerf, Monopoly, Cluedo, Baby Alive and Play-Doh.

Activity zones as well as merchandise and food stalls are spread across 4,800 sq m. The event hopes to attract 100,000 to 120,000 people.

Highlights: Super Claw – an oversized human claw machine and Singapore's largest – where you can get strapped into a harness to "become" the claw to grab toys and prizes.

At My Little Pony Rainbow Kingdom, children can get a makeover inspired by the toy line – complete with face paints, clip-on hair extensions and a tutu – and design their own figurine.

While their kids are occupied, parents can put on their detective hats at the Cluedo Tudor Mansion, an escape room modelled after the popular board game.

There are photo opportunities with Transformers characters Optimus Prime and Bumblebee as well as the Mr Monopoly and Play-Doh mascots. Mr Monopoly will also lead dragon dances from tomorrow to Wednesday.

Monopoly fans can step into the iconic green house or red hotel from the board game or test their luck at a chance vault, where they can win vouchers.

Chingay Carnival

Where: Open space behind Singapore Flyer, Raffles Avenue
When: Feb 15 to 17, 3 to 10pm
Admission: Free
Info: www.chingay.org.sg

The carnival was held for the first time last year in conjunction with the annual Chingay Parade, which started in 1973 as a street parade to celebrate Chinese New Year.

This year's edition will be bigger with more interesting and engaging offerings. The area will be transformed into a whimsical wonderland, where visitors can enjoy fun and interactive activities as well as mingle with Chingay performers. The parade takes place on Feb 15 and 16.

Highlights: The space will be divided into three zones – fun, art, and food and beverage.

The fun zone will have a go-kart circuit, where a 10-minute ride costs \$15. You can also try on colourful Chingay costumes and create your own set of Chingay headgear or wings that you can wear on the spot.

At the art zone, there are Instagram-worthy installations by youth. You can also get creative by painting or drawing butterflies – an element in line with Dreams Funtasia, the theme of this year's parade – on murals.

JKids Amusement Funland

Where: River Hongbao, The Float @ Marina Bay, 20 Raffles Avenue
When: Today to Feb 10, 2 to 11pm daily (except tomorrow, when the carnival closes at 1am)
Admission: Free
Info: www.jkidsamusement.com.sg

The carnival runs concurrently with the annual River Hongbao event, which started in 1987, and features classic carnival rides, game stalls and inflatables.

This year's edition, which spans 40,000 to 43,000 sq ft, is expected to attract one million people.

Mr Eddy Goh, 48, managing director of events solution provider J'Kids Amusement, who has been involved in carnival businesses since he was 14, says: "There is still a demand and an abundance of opportunities for carnivals to take place seasonally here."

"More than just an event for families and friends, carnivals bring back nostalgia for both young and old."

Highlights: This year's carnival has more than 20 rides and games, including a two-storey-tall horse carousel, a miniature train and bumper cars. Also, have some water fun on rides such as bumper boats and drum walkers.



The second edition of the Prudential Marina Bay Carnival features 50 rides and games from around the globe. ST PHOTOS: CHONG JUN LIANG

Prudential Marina Bay Carnival

Where: Bayfront Event Space, 12A Bayfront Avenue
When: Until March 24, 4 to 11pm daily (last entry at 10.30pm), closed on Feb 15 from 4 to 7pm
Admission: Credits for the rides, games and food can be purchased onsite or online
Info: marinabaycarnival.sg



The inaugural edition of the carnival in 2017 attracted 1.4 million people, had about 850,000 rides taken and witnessed more than 30 marriage proposals. It is billed as the largest carnival in Singapore.

The second edition – co-produced by events organiser Pico Pro and The Great European Carnival – features 50 rides and games from around the globe, spread over 23,000 sq m, about the size of four football fields.

Mr Barnabas Chia, 37, who heads the carnival's organising team, says the event took 300 days to plan and involved the transport of 950 tonnes of cargo in 64 shipping containers.

Highlights: The ongoing carnival, which started in December last year, boasts at least three new rides, such as the thrilling Freak Out, which oscillates and swings riders in random trajectories; and Jumper Jumper, which rotates riders around a centre hub.

There are more than 27 games such as Big Mouth, where players throw sacks to knock down the "teeth" in the large mouth, and Lobster Pot, where balls are tossed into a pot.

Visitors can also tuck into interesting dishes such as Thai basil mee and meatballs in a bucket as well as catch LED lion dance performances.

Singapore Festival of Fun

Where: Clarke Quay, 3 River Valley Road
When: March 14 to 24, various times
Admission: Free for Nickelodeon Fiesta and Street Fest. The Magners International Comedy Festival events are ticketed
Info: www.festivaloffun.sg

The inaugural edition in 2017 was a finalist in the Best Leisure Event category at last year's Singapore Tourism Awards, and its second edition last year attracted 24,000 visitors.

This year, the organisers are gunning for 30,000 visitors.

Highlights: Expect thrilling street acts, stand-up comedy and family-friendly games at this festival, which will be spread throughout Clarke Quay.

The Nickelodeon Fiesta on March 23 and 24 will feature new game booths and activities with themes from Nickelodeon shows such as SpongeBob SquarePants, Paw Patrol and Dora The Explorer, as well as stage games and photo opportunities.

The Street Fest, which runs from March 14 to 19, will see a new set of performers showcasing their talents for the first time in Singapore.

For example, The Sergeant Majors, a 3m-tall stilt walkabout act from Britain, will be going around to interact with visitors.

Another performer, Italian Otto il Bassotto, who is nicknamed the "Master of Balloons", will get inside a giant balloon and bounce around in it.

For the first time, the Street Fest will feature a Singaporean act called The Annoying Brothers, who got the nod from all three judges on television show Asia's Got Talent in 2017. Made up of two men in their 20s who have busked in Orchard Road, they will perform juggling tricks and jokes.

Also part of the event is the Magners International Comedy Festival, which takes place over two weekends next month in six bars in Clarke Quay.

The ticketed events will feature top-billing international comedians, such as Imran Yusof from Britain and Shayne Hunter from Australia, as well as Singaporean comedians Jinx Yeo and Jocelyn Chia.

The Sergeant Majors, a 3m-tall stilt walkabout act from Britain, will entertain visitors during the Street Fest at Clarke Quay.

PHOTO: COVENT GARDEN ENTERTAINMENT



At Kindness Carnival, children can ride on a truck convoy and go down an inflatable rooster slide that is about 9m tall. PHOTOS: UNCLE RINGO

Kindness Carnival

Where: Open field outside Beauty World MRT station
When: Until Feb 17, 6 to 10.30pm (weekdays), 5 to 10.30pm (weekends and public holidays)
Admission: Free
Info: www.unclelingo.com

This event, organised by veteran carnival operator Uncle Ringo with the support of the Singapore Kindness Movement, aims to help spread the word on kindness.

Uncle Ringo is Singapore's longest carnival operator, having organised countless carnivals, funfairs, themed parties and product launches since 1984.

Highlights: Apart from the usual bumper cars and fun games stalls, there is a kindness corner with free art and craft activities, as well as a farm attraction that aims to promote kindness to animals.

Visitors can also take photos with Singa the Lion, the mascot for the Singapore Kindness Movement, and watch lion dance performances throughout the Chinese New Year holiday.



SOME LIKE IT SLOW

As the pace of life quickens for many, people are looking to 'slow travel' journeys for a chance to rejuvenate and get in touch with themselves



Ancient Japanese retreat from urban life

The 900-year-old Kumano Kodo refers to a pilgrimage that stretches through the mountainous Kii Peninsula on Honshu island. In 2004, it was listed as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation World Heritage site.

You can choose to do just a day walk or one that spans over 11 days. I asked travel company Oku Japan (www.okujapan.com) to customise a seven-day solo itinerary that would include part of the touristy and better-marked Nakahechi route as well as the more remote and challenging Kohechi trail.

I would start my trip in Osaka, passing through Wakayama and Nara prefectures, and end in the legendary Mount Koya where I would check into a shukubo, a Buddhist temple with accommodation for tourists and pilgrims.

Kumano Kodo, especially the Kohechi, is not a walk in the park. Although some parts had me passing through sleepy towns, a large part of my trip involved trekking across forested mountain ranges thick with cedar, cypress and bamboo trees.

I climbed – sometimes vertically – for hours a day, scrambling over thick, knotty tree roots and steep boulders. I trudged along narrow paths where a misstep could mean falling 10 floors down into a ravine.

When it rained, I had to go slow, but had to make it out of the woods before sunset at around 4pm. Then, the sky would grow dark in minutes and the homestay that was expecting me would worry and call Oku Japan if I did not show up by a certain time. If that were to happen, a staff member, the police or park rangers would be deployed to look for me.

Despite these challenges, or because of them, the journey was a life-changing experience that echoes other pilgrimage walks.

I had chosen to do the Kumano Kodo in late November – the peak of autumn colours. The mountains were a colourful canvas of pumpkin, rust, cinnamon and cinnamon. Very often, the obstacles that

wound through heavily forested areas would suddenly lead to a clearing, like the secret entrance to an enchanted oasis.

I would sometimes find myself among ruins of old tea-houses – formerly pit stops for pilgrims hundreds of years ago. A lichen-covered Jizo (a bodhisattva) or Kannon (Goddess of Mercy) would be standing by, to lift the spirits of the weary and the faithful.

The surrounding silence was so crystal-clear that I would take a moment to listen to the symphony of insects in the undergrowth, bird-song in the distance and soft swoosh of leaves rustling and falling in the crisp autumn air. More than once, I would put a hand on the trunk of a tree. I swear I could sometimes feel a pulse resonating with something deeper within myself.

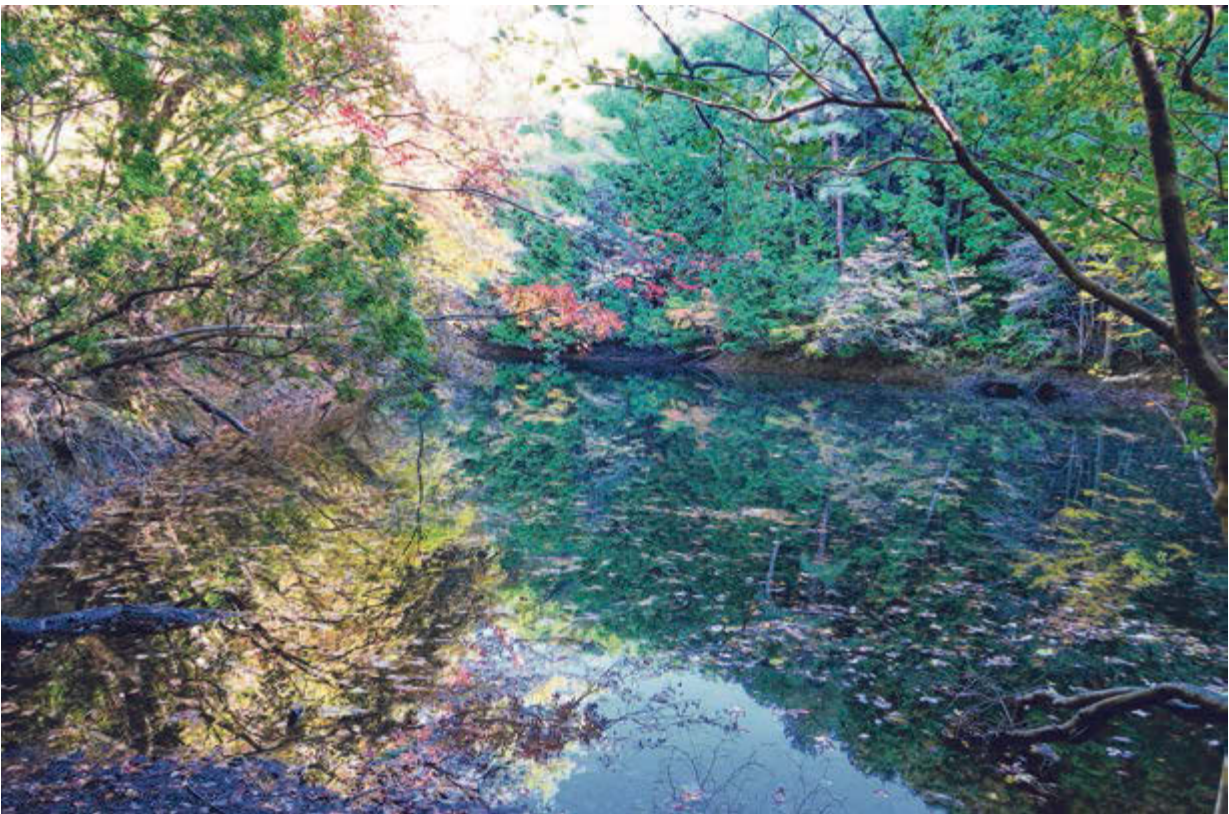
On some days, a mysterious fog wove around columns of Japanese cypress trees. It was easy to imagine kami – wood spirits in Japanese folklore – watching from behind the foliage. But I was far from spooked. I was filled with a simple joy, so connected to the forest.

After making my way through a different mountain pass every evening, I would check into a different ryokan (traditional Japanese inn), where I would first immerse myself in the onsen, fully aware of how smooth my skin felt after soaking in the steaming water.

The stillness of the day's hike would carry over to dinner and I would savour every bite.

The umeboshi (pickled plum), a speciality of Wakayama, was a pleasurable mix of sharp tartness and fragrant sweetness. The river trout in season was fresh and tender. The kindness from the often elderly owners of the ryokans also moved me.

By the time I reached the majestic Mount Koya, a day after one of the most gruelling nine-hour treks of my trip where I had no Internet signal to check my GPS (I took two wrong turns), I felt like I had never been in better spirits.



The Kumano Kodo journey takes travellers through gorgeous natural landscapes (top and above) of Japan that change colour through the seasons. PHOTOS: MAVIS TEO, OKU JAPAN



A suspension bridge (above) at the end of the day is a welcome sight as it means travellers are getting close to a town and the ryokan where they can rest for the night.

The statue of a deity (left) on the trail lifts the spirit of the faithful and serves as marker for the weary.

GETTING THERE

As there are many routes to take for the Kumano Kodo, the starting point may not be the same for everyone.

I started my Kumano Kodo walk in the quiet seaside town of Kii-Tamae.

To get there, I took a train and then a bus from Osaka. Singapore Airlines and All Nippon Airways fly direct from Singapore to Osaka.

Oku Japan (www.okujapan.com) offers trips ranging from four to 11 days. A non-guided, nine-day walk starts at \$1,800 while a nine-day guided one starts at \$4,380.

TIPS

- Invest in a pair of rainproof hiking boots and socks as you will be spending a lot of time trekking through rough terrain in them. For better support, use hiking poles as going downhill is tricky, especially after rainfall.
- Pack light. While on the trail, I carried a backpack containing one or two sets of underwear and socks, a booklet of detailed directions and map given by Oku Japan, a water bottle, my passport, wallet, mobile phone and charger, and some food for lunch.
- Most of the ryokans Oku Japan works with can arrange for your suitcase to be transported via courier service Ta-Q-Bin to a later accommodation so you can get a fresh change of clothes. Most of these ryokans also provide toiletries and laundry facilities.

Mavis Teo

The concept of "slow travel" is in demand. It is a movement that answers the modern malaise of having to be efficient, to rush and to hurry.

Slow travel has its roots in the same philosophies as the slow food trend.

Mr Carlo Petrini, Italian activist and founder of the Slow Food Movement, said in 2008 that "we have lost our sense of time".

His observation: "We have an idea that life is short – and we must go

faster to fit everything in. But life is long. The problem is we don't know how to spend our time wisely."

The slow traveller enjoys the experience of the journey unfurling, rather than the actual destination. He may travel by foot, train or boat. He is not out to "maximise" leave and pack tonnes into one itinerary. The idea is to breathe, relax and take it all in.

Many "slow travel" trips require one to unplug completely. There is no or extremely limited access to Wi-Fi and phone calls.

One might choose to sail along the Mekong Delta or hike through the wilderness.

Stone Horse Expeditions and Travel (www.stonehorsemongolia.com) offers horse-riding expeditions into national parks and tours in the Gobi Desert, providing stays with nomadic families.

The company's set departure expeditions are between eight and 14 days, with travel by horseback. This means that participants might see just part of a national park, but the fact that they are travelling mostly at a trot means they get to truly experience their surround-

ings – and their steeds.

Dr Sabine Schmidt, co-owner of the Mongolian company, says interest in its trips has risen 20 per cent year on year since it started in 2010. Bookings from Singaporeans tripled last year compared with 2012.

Many clients are professionals in demanding jobs, she says. What they want is not the "highlights" of Mongolia. Instead, they seek out journeys that deliberately have them moving at a different pace.

This, says Mr Joni Herison, marketing director of Druk Asia (www.drukasia.com), a Bhutan travel spe-

cialist, helps those in demanding jobs reconnect with themselves.

Druk Asia has seen a sharp increase in bookings in its treks, which last between three and six nights, from 2017 to last year. Of such bookings, 30 per cent came from Singaporeans. Two-thirds of the participants were high-flying career women in their 30s and 40s.

"Most of the time, they tell me they return to Singapore with a fresher mind," says Mr Herison. "They say they feel more in the present."

Ms Wu Ye-Her, executive director at an institute of higher learn-

ing, has been making a yearly slow travel trip to hike or dive since 2012. One of her most recent sojourns saw her spending a week discovering the coffee plantations in Medellin in Colombia on foot.

The focus of her trips is to relax and to get deeper into herself. The result: She returns home calm and with a fresh perspective on work and life. "I would find a breakthrough in a problem that has been plaguing me for a few months or even the year," says Ms Wu, 42.

Ready to jump on the slow travel trend? Here are two ways to do so.



It is an underwater world of Technicolor in the Pantar Strait, with walls of hard and soft coral and fish galore. PHOTOS: MAVIS TEO, THE ARENUI



GETTING THERE

I flew from Singapore to Maumere, with a layover, on Garuda Indonesia.

At the airport, I was greeted by the crew from the Arenui (www.thearenui.com), who ensured a seamless transfer to the dock where guests and their luggage are whisked away on a speed boat to the phinisi.

The next trip the Arenui is making to Alor is a 10-day one in April next year. The price a person is \$8,830.

TIPS

Internet connection is iffy out in the seas. Not many boats have satellite Wi-Fi. You can purchase a SIM card from Telkomsel, which is said to provide the best connectivity in these islands.

The Arenui (top), a boat designed for people to live in, offers a stylish way to enjoy the sunset on its top deck.

Customise your itinerary to visit villages (above) on the remote islands in the eastern Indonesian archipelago.



The Hidden Valley Resort is the first glamping (glamorous camping) boutique resort in Shangri-La, Yunnan. Located in a stunning Tibetan enclave in China's last frontier, the resort offers a truly unique travel experience. Besides glamping under the stars, you get to soak up Tibetan culture, hike, ride a horse, enjoy farm-to-table cuisine and venture to less-travelled places with a bespoke itinerary.

The incredible six-day-five-night package for two, valued at \$10,000, includes airfare, accommodation, three meals a day, guided activities and transportation such as airport transfers.

Rejuvenate yourself, experience the essence of Tibetan life and create memories of a lifetime in Shangri-La, Yunnan. For more details, go to thehiddenvalleyresort.com

How to win the giveaway:

- Download the SPH Rewards app.
- Look out for the giveaway in the Rewards section.
- Save the deal to your e-wallet.
- Press the "JOIN" button on the top right and answer this question in no more than 100 words:

"Why I want to go to The Hidden Valley Resort in Shangri-La".

The contest ends on Feb 8 and the winner will be informed by Feb 18. The travel period is between March and May 2019. The winner is required to participate in a media interview prior to the trip and to share photos on his or her social media during his or her stay. Other terms and conditions apply.

Read the story here: str.sg/hiddenvalley
Check out this ST video: str.sg/shangrila

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Activities run from sun-up to sundown at Wonderfruit in Thailand, where you can party with live music, learn Brazilian martial art capoeira, go for laughter yoga and make T-shirt yarn art with your kids. PHOTO: WONDERFRUIT

Wonderfruit

Wonderfruit is colourful, creative and larger than life. Towering art installations decorate the festival grounds at Siam Country Club near Pattaya in southern Thailand, while activities run from sun-up to sundown.

Crafty types will enjoy workshops on making dried flower crowns, beaded jewellery, wood-block prints and kokedama – a moss-covered ball topped with an ornamental plant.

Pick up self-massage techniques, bust some moves in a capoeira (Brazilian martial art) class and lift your spirits with classes on laughter yoga, where participants laugh out loud for prolonged periods to reap the benefits of laughter.

Wonderfruit is family-friendly too, with activities for little ones. These include hand-printing with colours made from fruit, herbs and spices, and T-shirt yarn art, where participants weave bracelets, coasters and pouches with yarn made from old T-shirts.

Wonderfruit takes place from Dec 12 to 16, with ticket prices to be announced.

For more information, go to www.wonderfruit.co



Do various styles of yoga and learn about meditation at the International Yoga Festival in Rishikesh, India, next month. PHOTO: INTERNATIONAL YOGA FESTIVAL

International Yoga Festival

Long before yoga became trendy, Rishikesh, a city in India's Uttarakhand province, had established itself as the yoga capital of the world.

It attracts thousands of students each year, who come for retreats, workshops or teacher trainings at the many ashrams or yoga schools located there.

The city is also home to the annual International Yoga Festival, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year.

Wake up early to attend various styles of yoga classes, from fast-paced power vinyasa to alignment-based Iyengar. Listen to lectures on topics such as meditation, chanting and Indian philosophy and end your day with a kirtan, or musical chanting, performance.

The seven-day programme is held at Parmarth Niketan Ashram, located along the Ganges River.

The festival takes place from March 1 to 7 and costs US\$79.74 (S\$107.70) for a day pass or from US\$473.49 for a week-long pass.

For more information, go to www.internationalyogafestival.org

Wanderlust

Wanderlust, which is into its 10th year, is the granddaddy of wellness festivals, taking place in major American cities and around the world throughout the year.

The bohemian event comprises two main arms – two- or four-day Wanderlust festivals and the day-long Wanderlust 108, which is billed as a mindful triathlon.

Wanderlust 108, which makes a stop in Osaka, Japan, this year, includes a 5km run, a 75-minute yoga session accompanied by a DJ

and a 25-minute guided meditation session. Post-exercise events usually include aerial-yoga and essential-oil workshops, tarot readings and an organic food and craft market.

While ticket prices and a date for Wanderlust 108 in Osaka have yet to be announced, a ticket to Wanderlust 108 in Los Angeles, for instance, which takes place in April, costs US\$26.08 (S\$35.30).

For more information, go to www.wanderlust.com



Bohemian festival Wanderlust is holding a one-day run, yoga and meditation event in Osaka. PHOTO: THURSTON WILLIS FOR WANDERLUST FESTIVAL

Feel-good festivals

Try acrobatic yoga, bust out some moves at DJ-led parties and learn new crafts at these wellness gatherings in Asia



Clara Lock

When Ms Amanda Koh teaches a yoga session at the Bali Spirit Festival, it is part class, part performance. Hundreds of students line rainbow rows of yoga mats, moving in unison. The open-air, thatched

shelter surrounded by palm trees and lush vegetation buzzes with energy.

The annual festival, which first took place in 2008, is one of many wellness events around the world attracting participants with a slew of feel-good offerings.

While wellness festivals first gained popularity in the West – there are more than a thousand in the United States alone – Asian editions have found their foothold in recent years.

Ms Koh, a full-time yoga teacher who first taught at the Bali Spirit Festival in 2015, says: "When I first

started teaching there, I could count the number of Asians I met on one hand. Now, they make up almost half of all participants."

She attributes this to yoga becoming more mainstream in Asia, with major cities such as Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok having a thriving yoga scene.

Although wellness festivals have become synonymous with yoga, wellness is broad enough for organisers to include something for everyone.

There are sessions on sound healing and crystal bowls, workouts such as pilates and barre, and DJs

helming dance parties that last well into the night.

Mr Daniel Joshua Lee, 27, went to Wonderfruit festival near Pattaya, Thailand, with three friends last year to experience new things.

He had never taken a yoga or meditation class before the festival. But he found he enjoyed "gong bath" meditation, where he was lulled to sleep by the vibrations of a gong and was invigorated by the mid-day power nap.

The digital growth executive also enjoyed a blindfold-painting session, where he chose four random colours to paint with while blind-

folded. It was a surprisingly introspective experience.

He says: "In Singapore, there are a lot of systems and structures in place to make our work more efficient, but I realised that for creativity to flow, you need to let go of your inhibitions."

"Besides the music and parties at night, the wellness side of Wonderfruit made me more aware of my body and mental state."

The Sunday Times rounds up five major yoga and wellness festivals in Asia coming up this year.

claral@sph.com.sg

Bali Spirit Festival

The Bali Spirit Festival takes place in Ubud, known as the cultural heart of Bali for its many Hindu temples, traditional crafts and dance set against a landscape of terraced rice paddies.

The line-up includes a variety of yoga classes, from slow-paced yin, which involves holding poses for a few minutes, to the fun and twisty acro yoga, which is short for acrobatic yoga and involves participants balancing on one another. There are also modern versions of yoga that include African drumming or heavy metal music.

If you are taking the family along, keep the kids entertained at workshops where they can learn to crochet mandalas, dye fabrics or pick up children's yoga. Babysitting services are available at the kids' zone.

The festival takes place from March 24 to 31. A full festival pass costs US\$575 (S\$775), while a three-day pass costs US\$325.

For more information, go to www.balispiritfestival.com



Join a variety of yoga classes at the Bali Spirit Festival in Ubud from March 24 to 31. PHOTO: BALI SPIRIT FESTIVAL

Murfest

Those who do not want to travel too far can spend a weekend at Murfest, or the Malaysian Urban Retreat Festival, held near Kuala Lumpur.

The wellness, music and dance festival features technique-based workshops on topics such as arm-balancing yoga poses and myofascial release, which involves applying pressure to fascia – connective tissue that holds the muscles, ligaments, bones and organs together – to release tension.

Those who prefer to let loose can join a dance class and shimmy along to Bollywood music, Indian folk dance and reggaeton, a combination of Latin rhythms and hip-hop or rap.

Previous editions of Murfest have been held at hotels such as Le Meridien and E.City Hotel at One City Sky Park, so there is no need to worry about getting sweaty on the festival grounds.

While dates and prices have yet to be released this year, a two-day festival pass to Murfest cost RM282.42 (S\$92) last year. For more information, go to www.murfest.com

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E-HONGBAO

HOW IT WORKS:
The user sends money to the recipient through a smartphone.

The recipient then gets a notification when the e-hongbao arrives.

Gong Xi Fa Cai!

Oops, "forgot" to charge my phone last night.

BABY BLUES™

BY RICK KIRKMAN & JERRY SCOTT

HEY. I'M ALMOST READY!

YEAH, UM, I WAS WONDERING IF YOU WOULD MIND GOING SHOPPING WITHOUT ME THIS AFTERNOON.

WHY?

WELL, MIEE'S GETTING SOME GUYS TOGETHER TO PLAY BASKETBALL, AND HE WANTS ME THERE.

IT'S FINE.

ARE YOU SURE?

I SAID IT'S FINE.

WHAT DID SHE SAY?

SHE SAID IT'S FINE.

OKAY, MAYBE NEXT TIME, THEN.

MOM! DAD BROKE THE CODE!

PEANUTS

featuring "Good ol' Charlie Brown"

by Schulz

HERE, I BOUGHT YOU SOMETHING.

HOW NICE!

I SAW YOU GIVE SOMETHING TO SNOOPY... WHAT WAS IT?

I GAVE HIM A FLEA COLLAR

THE ONLY TROUBLE WAS, IT TOOK ME AN HOUR TO GET IT ON THE FLEA!

SHERMAN'S LAGOON

BY JIM TOOMEY

IS THIS THE SUPER BOWL PARTY?

YEP, WELCOME.

WHAT'S THE SCORE?

GOT ME.

YOU'RE NOT WATCHING THE GAME?

I'M HERE FOR THE HALFTIME SHOW.

HOW ABOUT YOU? DO YOU KNOW THE SCORE?

I DON'T KNOW THE FIRST THING ABOUT FOOTBALL.

I'M SECRETLY WATCHING THE PUPPY BOWL.

RIGHT.

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW THE SCORE OF THE PUPPY BOWL?

NO.

WOULD YOU HAPPEN TO KNOW THE SCORE OF THE SUPER BOWL?

IS ANYBODY WATCHING THE GAME?

garfield.com

Please swipe your card

SWIPE

Would you like to donate a dollar to charity today?

BOOP

Enter PIN

BOOP BOOP BOOP BOOP

Your total is \$3.24. Is this correct?

BOOP

What is the square root of 324? Please show your work.

ALL I WANT IS A BAG OF CHEESE POODLES!

DON'T WE ALL?!

BREWSTER ROCKIT: SPACE GUY!

HALFTIME AT THE GALACTIC BOWL FOOTBALL GAME

... AFTER THE RUNNING BACK MOVES HERE, THE OFFENSIVE LINE STEPS UP, ALLOWING THE WIDE RECEIVER TO ENTER HERE. NEXT, THE TIGHT END STEPS UP OVER HERE ...

BY TIM RICKARD

IS HE DRAWING UP A PLAY?

HE'S CHOREOGRAPHING OUR END ZONE DANCE.

NOW COMES THE JAZZ HANDS ...

Sudoku Pacific

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

		7	8		9			
3			1		8			
1		3						
	5			7	2			
7		8			5			
6	4			9				
		5			2			
2		9			6			
8		4	2					

2/3

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Proton Puzzle Answer

7	5	1	2	3	6	8	4	9
9	2	8	7	4	1	5	3	6
3	4	6	5	8	9	1	2	7
5	1	3	8	2	7	9	6	4
2	6	4	3	9	5	7	8	1
8	7	9	6	1	4	2	5	3
1	3	7	4	5	8	6	9	2
6	8	2	9	7	3	4	1	5
4	9	5	1	6	2	3	7	8

Free to air

CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 15 (HD) (PG) (Variety)
6.35 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (Variety)
7.00 The Dr Oz Show 8 (HD) (Info-Ed)
8.00 Talking Point Specials (HD) (Current Affairs)
8.30 Wheel Of Fortune 35 (HD) (Variety)
9.30 Secret Meat Business (Info-Ed)
10.00 Andre Rieu: Welcome To My World (Culture)
11.00 Young Euro Classic 2017 Asian Youth Orchestra (Culture)
PM
12.15 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (Variety)
12.30 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (Info-Ed)
1.00 America's Got Talent 12 (HD) (PG) (Variety)
3.00 World's Best Beaches (HD) (Variety)
4.00 Buzzing Hawks (Variety)
5.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid (Variety)
5.30 Films & Stars (PG) (Variety)
6.00 Tricked (Canada) (PG) (Variety)
6.30 The Simpsons 29 (HD) (PG) (Sitcom)
7.00 Just For Laughs Gags 18 (Variety)
7.15 Cine On 5: Kung Fu Panda 2 (CC) (Movie)
9.00 News 5
9.30 Young Blood (PG) (CC) (Info-Ed)
10.30 David Blaine: Beyond Magic (PG13) (CC) (Variety)
11.30 Sunday Late Night Movie: Mega Python Vs Gatoroid (PG13) (CC) (Movie)
AM
1.20 Andre Rieu: Welcome To My World (Culture)
2.20 Young Euro Classic 2017 Asian Youth Orchestra (Culture)
3.40 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (Variety)
3.50 Tricked (Canada) (PG) (Variety)
4.20 Wheel Of Fortune 35 (HD) (Variety)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 8 (HD) (Info-Ed)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 Food Source 3 (HD) (Variety)
7.00 Portrait Of Home 2 (Drama)
9.00 Happy Friends (HD) (Schoolkids)
9.30 New Doraemon (Schoolkids)
10.00 Little Incredible Explorer (Schoolkids)
10.30 Mark Your Calendar (Schoolkids)

11.00 Tuesday Report – The Dream Catchers (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.30 One Hundred Tastes Of Taiwan 2 (HD) (Info-Ed)
PM
12.00 The Quarters (PG) (CC) (Drama) (Finale)
2.00 City Foragers (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.30 Say It! (Variety)
3.30 Home Dining (CC) (Variety)
4.30 Beyond Words (PG) (CC) (Drama)
6.30 Singapore Today (News)
7.00 Spring Flower (PG) (CC) (Drama)
9.00 Foodie Sunday (CC) (Variety)
10.00 News Tonight (News)
10.30 Discover 30 Degrees North Latitude (CC) (Variety)
11.30 New Year, Old Taste (CC) (Info-Ed)
AM
12.00 The Legend Of S (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.00 Unriddle 2 (PG) (Drama)
4.00 The Deer And The Cauldron (HD) (PG) (Drama)

CHANNEL U

AM
8.00 Home Shopping (Infomercial)
10.00 Perfect Match 3 (Variety)
PM
12.00 Big Big World 2 (Info-Ed)
12.30 Food Secrets (CC) (Info-Ed)
1.30 The Stories Between Us (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.00 Schools Unlimited (CC) (Info-Ed)
3.00 Golden Rainbow (PG) (CC) (Drama)
5.00 Lady With Class (PG) (CC) (Drama)
7.00 Sound Of My Dream 2 (Variety)
9.00 The Entertainer (PG) (CC) (Drama)
10.30 Spicy Hot (CC) (Variety)
11.00 News Tonight (News)
11.30 Sound Of My Dream 2 (Variety)
AM
1.30 Lord Of Shanghai (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.30 Close

CHANNEL NEWSASIA

AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
6.30 Correspondents' Diary
7.00 News Now
7.30 Asia Business First Weekend
8.00 News Now
8.30 Once A Refugee
9.00 News Now
9.30 This Weekend
10.02 Conversation With
10.30 The Making Of Singapore On Film
11.00 News Now
11.30 Correspondents' Diary

PM
12.00 News Now
12.30 Asia Business First Weekend
1.02 Japan Hour (English Subtitles)
2.00 News Now
2.30 Money Mind
3.00 News Now
3.30 Once A Refugee
4.02 Conversation With
4.30 The Making Of Singapore On Film
5.00 News Now
5.30 Asia Business First Weekend
6.00 News Now
6.30 Correspondents' Diary
7.02 The Making Of Singapore On Film (CC)
7.30 This Weekend (CC)
8.00 Primetime Asia
8.30 Asia Business First Weekend
9.02 Singapore On Film (CC)
10.00 Singapore Tonight
10.30 Correspondents' Diary
11.02 Singapore On Film
AM
12.00 News Now
12.30 This Weekend
1.02 Asia Business First Weekend
1.30 Correspondents' Diary
2.00 News Now
2.30 Money Mind
3.02 Conversation With
3.30 This Weekend
4.00 News Now
4.30 The Making Of Singapore On Film
5.02 Singapore On Film
Programmes may be pre-empted by breaking news

VASANTHAM

PM
1.00 Aatishbaazi Ishq (PG) (Movie)
4.00 Dhoorathu Patchai (PG) (CC) (Movie)
7.00 OK Kanmani (Schoolkids)
7.30 Ha Ha Ha Sirippu 10 (Variety)
8.00 Vera Level (CC) (Info-Ed)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 8 Thottakkal (PG) (Movie)
AM
12.00 Tamil Seithi (HD) (News) (R)
12.30 Close

OKTO

AM
7.00 Tip The Mouse (Preschool)
8.00 Sesame Street (HD) (Preschool)
9.00 OddBods (Schoolkids)
9.30 Tobot (HD) (Schoolkids)
10.00 Future Card Buddyfight Ace (Schoolkids)
10.30 CardFight!! Vanguard (Schoolkids)
11.00 Lego Ninjago 9 – Hunted (Schoolkids)
11.30 Extreme Football (Schoolkids)

PM
12.00 Basic Mini-tary Training (Schoolkids)
12.30 Museum Mysteries (Schoolkids)
1.00 Loud House (Schoolkids)
1.30 Jane And The Dragon (Schoolkids)
2.00 Inazuma Eleven (Schoolkids)
2.30 The Deep (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
3.00 Future Card Buddyfight X (HD) (Schoolkids)
3.30 CardFight!! Vanguard G: Next (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
4.00 Bear Grylls Survival School (HD) (PG) (CC) (Schoolkids)
4.30 Loud House (Schoolkids)
5.00 Jane And The Dragon (Schoolkids)
5.30 Inazuma Eleven (Schoolkids)
6.00 Totally Totto (HD) (Schoolkids)
6.30 Fableicious (HD) (Schoolkids)
7.00 The Deep (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
7.30 Future Card Buddyfight X (HD) (Schoolkids)
8.00 CardFight!! Vanguard G: Next (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
8.30 Bear Grylls Survival School (HD) (PG) (CC) (Schoolkids)
9.00 Ninja Warrior (PG) (CC) (Variety)
9.30 Perfection (CC) (Sports)
10.00 Max Muay Thai: Ultimate Muay Thai (HD) (PG13) (Sports)
AM
12.00 Close

SURIA

AM
10.00 Atuk PhD (Drama)
11.00 Solo (CC) (Info-Ed)
PM
12.00 Balik Sekolah (Drama)
12.30 Suami Tanpa Cinta (PG) (Drama)
1.30 #Urbanista (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.00 Isteri Tuan Ihsan (PG) (Drama)
3.00 Juara Memasak Milenia (CC) (Variety)
4.00 Meh Sandar Pada Aku (PG) (Drama)
5.00 Setia Menunggumu (PG) (CC) (Drama)
6.00 Tahu Nahu (Schoolkids)
6.30 Cakap-Cakap (Variety)
7.00 The Project (CC) (Info-Ed)
7.30 Jalan-Jalan Makan Angin (CC) (Info-Ed) (Debut)
8.00 Berita (News)
8.30 Wahhhnita (PG) (CC) (Info-Ed)
9.30 Setia Menunggumu (PG) (CC) (Drama)
10.30 The Streets 2 (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.00 Juang Seorang Usahawan (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.30 Berita (News) (R)
AM
12.00 Close

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singtelv.com.sg

Television Life

Horoscope



March 21
- April 19



April 20
- May 20



May 21
- June 20



June 21
- July 22



July 23
- Aug 22



Aug 23
- Sept 22



Sept 23
- Oct 22



Oct 23
- Nov 21



Nov 22
- Dec 21



Dec 22
- Jan 19



Jan 20
- Feb 18



Feb 19
- March 20

Your leadership skills are much in demand, so show your team how things are done. At least one person needs to feel important – give him a role that matches his skills and energy.

Try not to worry too much about how strange things get as they should get sorted out in a few days. In fact, things could start to get quite a lot better sooner.

You meet someone new who spins your head around. It could be romantic, but it is more likely that you run into a person who is set to change your life in a different and big way.

Try to be more flexible when it comes to new situations as they are coming quickly. Your energy is just right for adaptation and going with the flow, as hard as that can sometimes be.

You need to think way outside the box, so far out that you end up preferably in a different time zone. Stretch your mental energy to its limit and all should be well.

Someone is making big mistakes, but he needs constructive criticism, not snarky zingers. Make sure he gets respect for his efforts, even if you think the whole thing is a waste of time.

Your great social energy pretty much guarantees a fun day, so make the most of it. Share the good times or go off on your own for a well-deserved vacation.

You need to deal with a touchy family situation even if it would be easier to ignore it. A parent or an older relative is making life hard for himself and only you can break the cycle.

You need to branch out from your usual haunts and try somewhere new – you might even find your next favourite place. It is a good idea to grab a friend and go exploring tonight.

Your thinking about the future is clearer than usual, so you ought to be able to come up with something good if you plan ahead. Today might not be so great, but it gets better soon.

Your vision of the future is easier than ever to communicate, so make sure you are talking it up. At work, at home, with friends – everyone needs to hear from you.

Your thoughts are out of control, so make sure you are not in a place that demands focus. If so, you may want to ease back a bit and see if others pick up the slack.

• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
6.40 Pawn Stars 19
7.05 Storage Wars 12
7.35 The Pickers 11
8.30 Counting Cars 5
9.00 Counting Cars 6
9.30 History Drama: Vikings 5
10.25 Ancient Aliens 11
11.20 Ancient Aliens 10
PM
12.15 The Curse Of Oak Island 5
1.10 The Curse Of Civil War Gold
2.05 Milwaukee Blacksmith
2.35 History Drama: Vikings 5
3.30 The Curse Of Oak Island 5
4.25 Ancient Aliens 10
5.20 Ancient Aliens 11
6.15 The Pickers 12
7.10 Every Street Tells A Story
8.05 Forged In Fire 5
9.00 Mountain Men 7
9.55 The Untold Story Of The 90s
11.45 The Pickers 12

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
6.00 Bring It! 2
7.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
PM
12.00 Married At First Sight Australia 4
3.00 House Of Darkness: New Blood
4.35 Seatbelt Psychic
5.00 Born This Way 2
6.00 Tiny House Nation
7.00 Gok's Fill Your House For Free
8.00 Up! Pretty
10.00 He Loves Me
11.35 Hoarders 8

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
6.25 Morning Glory
8.10 Ingrid Goes West (NC16)
9.50 The Zookeeper's Wife (NC16)
11.55 Equilibrium (NC16)
PM
1.40 Ready Player One (NC16)
3.55 Megamind
5.30 Brave
7.00 Baywatch (NC16)
9.00 Justice League
10.55 Inconceivable (2017) (NC16)
AM
12.40 The Talented Mr Ripley
2.55 Equilibrium (NC16)
4.45 You, Me And Dupree (NC16)

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
7.00 Lethal Weapon 4
9.05 Terminal Invasion
10.30 Tango One (NC16)
PM
12.20 The Corruptor
2.10 Against The Ropes
4.00 Bigger Fatter Liar
5.40 Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge Of The Sith
8.05 Mission To Mars (PG)
10.00 Rock Of Ages (NC16)
AM
12.00 Catwoman
1.45 Hidden (NC16)
3.05 Big Momma's House (NC16)
4.45 Big Momma's House 2 (NC16)

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
6.31 Wok Of Love (HD)
7.45 Happy Camp 2 (HD)
9.30 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 4 (HD)
10.30 Momo's Paradise 4 (HD)
11.00 Pleasant Goat And Big Big Wolf – Flying Island: The Sky Adventure (HD)
11.30 Young Travellers' Survival Handbook (HD)
PM
12.00 Follow Me 8 (HD)
12.30 Perfect Match 6 (HD)
2.00 Maritime Silk Road (HD)
3.00 Familiar Taste (HD)
4.30 Taste Taiwan 3 (HD)
5.00 Liao Zhai 4 (HD)
7.00 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 4 (HD)
8.00 I Am The Actor (HD)
10.00 Sweet Dreams (HD)

HUB SPORTS1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
6.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
7.00 Tennis: 2019 Davis Cup By BNP Paribas Qualifier Round: Germany Vs Hungary – Day 1
PM
1.30 Mountain Bike: Enduro World Series 2018: Season Review Highlights
2.00 National Basketball League 2018/19: Round 16 Melbourne United Vs New Zealand Breakers
4.00 Asean Basketball League 2018/19: Singapore Slingers Vs CLS Knights Indonesia
6.00 Tennis: Deuce 2019
6.30 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered 2019
7.00 Extreme Sports: World Surf

League 2018: Billabong Pipe Masters Highlights
8.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
9.00 Tennis: 2019 Davis Cup By BNP Paribas Qualifier Round: Germany Vs Hungary – Day 2
AM
5.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
7.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
7.20 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series 2018/19 Round 4 Sydney: Quarter-finals Matches 25 To 32/ Semi-finals Matches 33 To 40 (Live)
PM
1.30 Football: The EFL Highlights 2018/19
1.55 HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series 2018/19 Round 4 Sydney: Matches 41 To 45 (Live)
4.15 The Football Review
4.30 Wrestling: WWE Afterburn (PG)
5.30 Magazine: The Pioneer
6.30 Fiba World Basketball 2019
7.00 Asean Basketball League 2018/19 San Miguel Alab Pilipinas Vs Saigon Heat (Live)
9.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
9.30 Football: EFL Championship 2018 Matchday 30 Leeds United Vs Norwich City
11.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
AM
12.00 Wrestling: WWE Afterburn (PG)
12.55 Magazine: Trans World Sport 2019
1.55 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
2.30 Asean Basketball League 2018/19 Mono Vampire Vs Zhuhai Wolf Warriors
4.30 Football: Coppa Italia 2018/19 Quarter-finals Fiorentina Vs Roma

HUB SPORTS 3 (CHANNEL 204)

AM
10.00 Golf: Best Lessons Ever 2018
10.30 Golf: Advisor Round Trip 2018
11.00 Golf: Driven 2018: Oklahoma State Cowboys – The Rivals
11.30 Golf: Driven 2018: Oklahoma State Cowboys – The Streak
PM
12.00 Golf: Driven 2018: Oklahoma State Cowboys – The Showdown
12.30 Golf: European Tour 2019: Saudi International Day 3
5.30 Golf: European Tour 2019: Saudi International Day 4
10.00 Golf: Asian Tour 2018: Q-School Finals Highlights
11.00 Golf: European Tour 2019: Saudi International Day 1

Singtel TV

DISCOVERY (HD) (CHANNEL 202)

AM
6.35 Gold Rush 9
7.25 How To Build... Everything
7.50 The Mind Control Freaks
8.15 Nasa's Unexplained Files
9.05 Wheeler Dealers 14
9.55 Speed Is The New Black 2
10.45 How Do They Do It? 15
11.35 Incredible Engineering Blunders: Fixed
PM
12.25 Smart China
2.55 Smart China: Start Up Revolution
4.35 The 1980s: The Deadliest Decade 2
5.25 Gold Rush 9
6.15 Manhunt With Joel Lambert
7.10 Ed Stafford: First Man Out
8.05 Pandamonium
9.00 Revealed: Malaysia's Majesty
9.55 Ed Stafford: First Man Out
10.50 Bear Grylls: Fine Dining
11.45 The 1980s: The Deadliest Decade 2

TLC (HD) (CHANNEL 254)

AM
6.35 Zumbo's Just Desserts
7.25 90 Day Fiance 6
9.05 Outdaughtered 3
9.55 Buddy's Big Bakedown
10.45 Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party 2
11.35 Bizarre Foods With Andrew Zimmern 10
PM
12.25 Dr Pimple Popper
1.15 Cruise The World
1.40 New Taste Of Hong Kong
2.05 The Little Couple 9
2.55 Star Plates
3.45 Jamie & Jimmy's Food Fight Club 5
4.35 What If We Get Married?
5.25 Cruise The World
5.50 New Taste Of Hong Kong
6.15 Separated At Birth
7.10 Outdaughtered 3
8.05 Dr Pimple Popper
9.00 Star Plates
9.55 Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party 2
10.50 Buddy's Big Bakedown
11.45 Fast Food Mania

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

AM
6.00 Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders
7.40 Team Ninja Warrior 2
9.25 Supernatural 14
10.20 Hawaii Five-0 9
11.10 The Replacement Killers
PM
1.00 Caught On Camera With Nick Cannon 2
1.55 Hawaii Five-0 9
2.45 The Amazing Race 29

5.25 Caught On Camera With Nick Cannon 2
6.20 The Blacklist 6
7.15 Hawaii Five-0 9
8.10 MacGyver 3
9.05 Seal Team 2
10.00 Supernatural 14
10.55 Charlie's Angels

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

AM
6.00 Clipaholics
7.40 The Carbonaro Effect
10.10 Breaking The Magician's Code
11.00 Friends 9
11.50 Keanu
PM
1.30 Crazy, Stupid, Love
3.40 Race To The Scene
4.30 Top 20 Funniest 2
6.00 The Big Bang Theory 12
6.25 Young Sheldon 2
6.50 The Man From U.N.C.L.E.
9.00 Jack The Giant Slayer
11.05 The Big Bang Theory 9
11.30 Friends 9
11.55 Arrow 7

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

AM
6.00 The Reaction Hall Of Fame
7.20 Super Ultimate Candid Camera
8.00 Mr Bean
9.00 Just For Laughs Gags 14
9.25 The Muppets All-Star Comedy Gala
10.40 Saturday Night Live 44
11.45 The Daily Show 24
PM
12.15 Corporate
1.55 Back To School Special
2.35 The Comedy Jam
3.25 Amazingness
4.15 Detroitiers
5.05 Saturday Night Live 44
6.10 Amazingness
6.50 The Jim Jefferies Show
7.40 Back To School Special
8.25 Idiotsitter
9.15 The Jim Jefferies Show
10.05 Funny As Hell 4
11.10 Inside Amy Schumer 2
11.55 Russell Simmons Presents

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

AM
6.00 Stylish Man
7.00 The Legend Of Golden Music
8.00 Hua Hee Seko-Lah 5
8.30 The Golden Melodies 2018
10.00 All Out Of Love
PM
12.00 Stylish Man
1.00 The Golden Melodies 2018
2.30 All Out Of Love
4.30 The Legend Of Golden Music

5.30 Hua Hee Seko-Lah 5
6.00 Stylish Man
7.00 All Out Of Love
9.00 Super Nightclub
10.30 Top Singers

VIDEO ON DEMAND

1 The Theory Of Everything (HD) (Latest)
2 23:59 The Haunting Hour (Mandarin)
3 Lagenda Budak Hostel (Cine Ekspres)
4 Kaathiruppor Pattiyal (Kollywood)
5 Kaala Hindi (Bollywood)

Programmes available anytime on demand

MIO STADIUM (HD) (CHANNEL 102)

AM
6.00 PL 18/19 Everton Vs Wolverhampton Wanderers
8.00 PL 18/19 Crystal Palace Vs Fulham
10.00 Premier League Express
PM
12.00 Premier League HQ
1.00 PL 18/19 Tottenham Hotspur Vs Newcastle United
3.00 PL 18/19 Brighton & Hove Albion Vs Watford
5.00 Premier League HQ
6.00 PL 18/19 Chelsea Vs Huddersfield Town
8.00 Premier League HQ
9.00 PL

Hunger Management

Meatless decadence

While mushrooms are a vegetarian food, many of them have a meaty texture, which makes for a light, satisfying meal



Hunger Management
Tan Hsueh Yun

So I was walking across the office lobby just before Christmas and bumped into a former boss.

“I have a quarrel with you,” he said. “Just as I’m about to start my Christmas feasting, I read your story telling me to drink water before going to a party?”

I told him I did not know what had come over me either.

The story was about how not to overeat at Christmas.

I had interviewed hospital dietitians, who offered all kinds of tips – from making festive food healthier to, yes, pre-loading with water before a feast. It kills the urge to eat. And it works. I’ve tried it several times.

Normally, I love feasts. Big, elaborate ones, plates piled high, tables groaning with food, people groaning with pleasure as they inhale said food.

So when did I become a party pooper?

I guess all that eating became too much and I just do not want to do it any more. I still feast, but strategically and not every day.

As we gear up for the relentless onslaught of Chinese New Year feasting, I confess I feel some anxiety. Already, I have had too many lo hei meals with endless courses of rich food.

Will my resistance crumble when offered pineapple tarts, my absolute favourite Chinese New Year treat? Will I eat too many slices of bak kwa? Will I lose control and demolish a whole tub of kueh bangkit?

So it is perhaps a good thing that I haven’t found a pineapple tart this year that I really, really like.

Recently, I walked through a large and popular Chinese New Year fair in a mall and was unmoved by the offerings. Imagine that.

But a smarter strategy would be to pace myself and schedule lots of plain meals in between the elaborate ones, I think.

So this week’s recipe is vegetarian, just rich enough and not too decadent.

I love mushrooms because many varieties have a meaty texture. Here, I stuff portobellos with spinach, panko crumbs, pine nuts and parmesan cheese.

Leave out the cheese if you want it a little more austere, but it really does bind the filling together.

Look for portobellos with deep caps, as they hold the mountain of filling a lot better.

If, for some reason, you do not like mushrooms, you can use zucchini instead. Slice them lengthwise, use a spoon to scrape out the centre core, chop that up and add it to the filling.

Brush the hollowed-out zucchini with the mushrooms, roast for 10 minutes, fill and roast again.

Two stuffed mushrooms make a filling meal for one, or serve them as a side dish for four people, alongside grilled chicken or fish.

I am currently obsessed with grilling and eating fish collar, especially buri or hamachi ones. They’re both yellowtail, but buri are larger.

I get mine from the fish section of Japanese supermarkets. They are so easy to cook – rinse, dry, rub with salt and place in the oven in the grill setting and let the skin become blistered and crisp.

It takes 15 to 20 minutes, depending on the size of the collar.

Eat the fish with oroshi, which is grated daikon, doused with shoyu or ponzu. Take time to excavate the collar, there is so much meat lurking everywhere.

A meal of grilled fish is entirely in keeping with the nian nian you yu vibe of Chinese New Year, and is delicious, especially with the abundantly stuffed mushrooms.

(The Chinese saying means “ample surplus every year”, with “yu” sounding both like surplus and fish.)

I’m scheduling this very meal for Thursday because my sister, who will be in town, has pleaded in advance for a reprieve from the feasting.

I know where she’s coming from. And we are going to watch out for each other when we go visiting.

And drink lots of water.

hsueh@sph.com.sg

• www.facebook.com/tanhhsuehyun



Portobellos stuffed with spinach, panko crumbs, pine nuts and parmesan cheese make a filling meal or side dish.

ST PHOTO: TAN HSUEH YUN

STUFFED MUSHROOMS

INGREDIENTS

- 75g pine nuts
- 1 medium onion
- 1Tbs cooking oil, plus more for brushing on the mushrooms
- 125g baby spinach
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 75g panko crumbs
- 75g parmesan cheese, grated
- 4 large portobello mushrooms

METHOD

- Preheat oven to 180 deg C.
- Place the pine nuts in a pan without oil, set it over medium-low

heat and slowly toast them, moving the pan constantly, until they become golden brown. Pour onto a plate and set aside to cool.

3. Chop the onion finely.

4. Heat a frying pan over medium heat, add the 1Tbs of oil and the onion. Saute until the onion turns translucent. Add all the spinach and give the pan a good stir until the spinach has wilted. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Pour the onion and spinach mixture into a large mixing bowl, together with the panko crumbs and parmesan cheese. Add most of the pine nuts, reserving a few for garnish.

Using a large metal spoon,

combine the ingredients in the bowl. Set aside.

5. Slice off the mushroom stems and use a damp paper towel to wipe off any dirt clinging to the mushrooms. Place them on a foil or baking paper-lined tray. Brush all over with cooking oil. Place in the oven and roast for 10 minutes.

6. Remove the tray from the oven. Divide the filling into four portions and heap it on the mushrooms. Sprinkle on the remaining pine nuts. Return the tray to the oven and cook another 10 minutes, or until the panko is golden brown. Serve.

Serves two as a main course, four as a side dish

Open For Business



PHOTOS: SUBROSA PRIVATE DINING, OMURICE KEISUKE, LITTLE CAESARS PIZZA

SUBROSA

Subrosa is a private dining restaurant in a restored shophouse in Jalan Besar offering a farm-to-table fine-dining experience.

It serves evolving five-course (from \$108++ a person) and seven-course (\$148++) menus based on the season’s freshest produce.

Menu highlights include Prawn Star – sous vide jumbo prawn served with cauliflower cream and shrimp bisque; and Fresh Is Best – cured scallop served with fermented melon, pickled cucumber, dill oil and caviar.

Another standout dish is Golden Duck (above) – sous vide duck and foie gras with carrot cream, chutney and pickled blackberries.

For dessert, the Tropical Passion – mango and lime sorbet served with coconut pudding – is recommended.

The restaurant occupies two floors, and its second floor is a private area for up to 20 guests. It requires a minimum spending of \$1,000, and personalised menus and service are provided.

The second floor also boasts a lounge room for pre-dinner aperitifs or post-meal digestifs.

Where: 369 Jalan Besar

Open: 11am to midnight daily

Info: Call 6610-0555, e-mail sales@subrosa.com.sg, or go to www.subrosa.com.sg or www.facebook.com/subrosaprivatedining



OMURICE KEISUKE

Omurice Keisuke at Bugis+ is the 17th outlet under the Keisuke Group. It is helmed by chef Keisuke Takeda, whose accolades include being crowned the Ramen Champion at the 2011 Tokyo Ramen Championships.

Omurice is a Western-influenced Japanese dish that consists of a wrapped omelette (omu) over Western fried rice with ketchup.

The key to good omurice is the egg and Omurice Keisuke’s version (\$9.90++, above) features the chef’s own locally farmed eggs from hens fed with omega-rich grains.

There is also the option to customise your omurice meal by choosing from a range of sauces such as wafu, demi-glace, creamy white

sauce or chilli tomato sauce.

Add \$2++ for mozzarella or cheddar cheese which will be melted over your main dish.

For noodle or pasta lovers, try the Neapolitan or Mentaiko Spaghetti (\$9.90++).

Main dishes come with potato salad, coleslaw, green salad or spinach and miso soup.

Side dishes (\$2++ to \$3++ each) such as deep-fried chicken wing, ebi-fried, teriyaki chicken hamburger and pork spare ribs are also available.

Where: 04-01 Bugis+, 201 Victoria Street

Open: 11.30am to 10pm daily

Info: Call 6634-4558 or go to www.keisuke.sg or www.facebook.com/KeisukeTokyoSG



LITTLE CAESARS PIZZA

The American pizza chain, which has outlets in 23 countries and territories, has opened its first restaurant in Singapore.

Located at the Income at Raffles building along Collyer Quay, the Singapore outlet serves the chain’s signature Hot-N-Ready pizzas such as the 12-inch Large Pepperoni Pizza (\$7.99).

It also has several other pizza offerings (\$13.49) – Hula Hawaiian, Meat Treat, Ultimate Supreme and Veggie.

Single-serve combos of one Pepperoni or Cheese pizza (\$6), or one Hawaiian or Veggie pizza (\$7), each comes with a 16oz fountain drink. The single-serve pizza itself is \$4.49

to \$5.49.

Little Caesars is also popular for its Crazy Bread (\$2.99 for 4 pieces with sauce) and Caesar Wings (\$5.99 for 6 pieces), which are also available as combos that include pizza and a drink.

The Family Combo (\$35) comprises two large Pepperoni or Cheese pizzas, two Crazy combos, six pieces of Caesar Wings and a large drink.

Where: 01-05 Income At Raffles, 16 Collyer Quay

Open: 10am to 8pm (Mondays to Fridays), 10am to 3pm (Saturdays)

Info: Call 6260-5272

• Opening a restaurant? Send the details to stlife@sph.com.sg

Doing justice to bao

The 71-year-old Teck Kee Tanglin Pau may have closed its three outlets last Wednesday, but there are still plenty of places to satisfy your bao cravings. Here are eight of the best



Eunice Quek
Food Correspondent



PHOTOS: EUNICE QUEK, TNP

TANJONG RHU PAU & CONFECTIONERY (left)

What: It is known for its mini-sized steamed buns packed with ingredients.

The tau sar bao and lotus paste bao are 60 cents each, while the char siew bao is 70 cents.

While the skin for the big pork bao and chicken bao (\$1.40) is on the thicker side, the meat is juicy and tasty, and you get a big wedge of hard-boiled egg.

Where: 389 Guillemard Road, open: 10.30am to 10pm daily, closed tomorrow to Saturday.



TIONG BAHRU PAU

What: The popular chain's char siew bao (\$1) and big bao (\$1.80) are not to be missed.

The char siew is not an alarming red and you get nice chunky bits of pork that are not too sweet.

The big bao (\$1.80) also has juicy chunks of pork.

Where: Outlets include 02-18/19 Tiong Bahru Market & Food Centre; 01-38 Block 208 New Upper Changi Road; and 01-550 Block 190 Toa Payoh Lorong 6, various opening hours

Info: E-mail tbpau@tiongbahru-pau.com



TEOCHEW HANDMADE PAU

What: The handmade bao are small and easy to eat. It is easy to eat many pieces of the kong bak bao (80 cents) – like a miniature pulled pork bun – at a go.

An intriguing option is the Boy & Girl Bao (\$1.20) – a delicious combination of salted egg yolk and lotus paste that is not too sweet. The stall also sells longevity peach buns (80 cents) filled with lotus paste.

Where: 02-02 Block 127 Toa Payoh Lorong 1, open: Tuesdays to Sundays 6am to 2pm, closed on Mondays



THE BAO MAKERS CAFE & BAKERY

What: Putting a modern spin on the traditional kong bak bao, The Bao Makers offer chilli crab bao and salted egg chicken bao (\$5.80 each) in the style of fried mantou. The mantou for salmon mentaiko (\$5.80 each) and veggie bao (\$4.50) is steamed.

Go for the fried version for added crunch and texture.

Where: 4 Jiak Chuan Road, open: noon to 3pm, 6 to 11pm, Mondays to Saturdays, closed on Sundays

Info: Call 6291-2330 or go to www.baomakers.com



CHOP HEAN KUAN (TOH KEE)

What: The handmade bao have thin and soft skin, even when they are cold. The char siew bao (\$1) filling has a good bite and texture, while the tau sar bao (\$1) paste is smooth and creamy.

Where: 01-1018 People's Park Food Centre, 32 New Market Road, open: 8am to 9pm, Tuesdays to Sundays, closed on Mondays; closed tomorrow to Feb 11



NAM KEE PAU

What: The famous brand from Johor Baru is brought in by the Fei Siong Group, which runs food and beverage chains such as Let's Eat, Encik Tan and the Malaysia Boleh! foodcourts in Singapore.

The Amy Yip Big Pau (\$4) is a hefty bun filled with chicken, pork and hard-boiled egg. The skin of the bun is not too thick and remains soft without going too soggy. The steamed bao is named after the voluptuous former Hong Kong actress of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The chain also sells char siew bao (90 cents) and lotus paste bao (80 cents), along with noodle dishes.

Where: Outlets include B4-66 Ion Orchard; B1-K17 Tampines 1; and B1-04 West Mall, various opening hours

Info: Call 6370-1155 or go to nam-keepau.com.sg for the list of outlets



DOUGH MAGIC

What: Dough Magic specialises in handmade buns. There is no filling in their rose-shaped bao (two for \$1), but they are probably the most Instagram-worthy ones.

Other buns with no filling include longevity peach buns (\$1), pumpkin (two for \$1) and brown sugar (two for \$1). They are best eaten hot and dipped into chilli crab gravy. These mantou-style buns are available for a limited time during the festive period.

If you prefer buns with filling, try the sour cabbage pork bun (\$1), spring onion pork bun (\$1), black sesame paste bun (\$1.50) and braised pork bun (\$1.20).

Where: Outlets include 01-K99B People's Park Complex, 1 Park Road; B2-128 Northpoint City; and Block 763 Jurong West Street 75, various opening hours

Info: Call 6904-9549



REDSTAR RESTAURANT

What: The old-school dim sum restaurant, which peddles its items in pushcarts, serves probably the biggest of the big baos (\$6) and with the most ingredients. There is a mix of chicken and pork, along with salted egg yolk, mushrooms and lup cheong (Chinese sausage) – making for a very tasty combination. It is best to call the restaurant ahead to order.

Where: 07-23 Block 54 Chin Swee Road, open: 7am to 3pm, 6 to 10pm daily, closed till Tuesday

Info: Call 6532-5266 or go to redstarrestaurant.com.sg

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Swig

The S'pore spirit

The home-grown craft spirits and beer market has expanded with more microbreweries and distilleries being set up locally and overseas



Anjali Raguraman

While the Singapore Sling and Tiger Beer may be Singapore's most famous alcoholic exports, the Republic has more up its sleeve – if the burgeoning home-grown craft spirits and beer market is any indication.

From a microbrewery called Pink Blossoms Brewing predominantly making New England-style beers to microdistilleries such as The Orientalist Spirits, Brass Lion Distillery and Tanglin Gin making gins with botanicals familiar to Singaporeans, the past seven months have seen several new entries to the made-in-Singapore alcohol space.

Mr Teo Hong Han, who founded Pink Blossoms Brewing's microbrewery and taproom in Ubi, says his intention was to "introduce more variety into Singapore's craft beer scene and growth".

The 34-year-old Singaporean, who was based in New York City formerly as an accountant, says he wanted to share the amazing flavours discovered in the US with folks back here.

"What better way to do it than to come home and set up a brewery," says Mr Teo, who took an eight-month, part-time brewing diploma course while in the United States.

"The course gave me the basics, but coming up with recipes and being familiar with the brewing system was something that could only be done through trial and error," he says, adding that a six-figure sum was pumped into the project.

Since opening the taproom's doors in August last year, Mr Teo has brewed about 10 different styles of beer – from saisons to stouts – and makes about 3,000 litres in total a month.

His customers include office workers in the area, who pop in for a drink after work, and craft beer connoisseurs.

CHANGING TASTES

Locally, consumption of alcoholic drinks and tobacco has gone up, increasing by 4.9 per cent from 2017 to 2018, according to Consumer Price Index figures for last year released by the Department of Statistics.

According to a report on alcoholic drinks in Singapore by global market research firm Euromonitor, there has also been a shift in consumer preference towards niche drinks such as craft beer and spirits "owing to increasingly sophisticated tastes".

It added: "As consumer knowledge on alcohol improves, consumers are more willing to experiment with new and specialised tastes."

AVAILABLE INDUSTRY

The shift in tastes has translated into increased demand and a viable business for some in the home-grown craft spirits industry, like Tanglin Gin.

The first made-in-Singapore gin is distilled in a facility in Mandai and entered the market in July last year.

Founded by four expatriates from Holland, Australia and the United Kingdom, their flagship orchid gin now shares shelf space with commercially available gins at Changi Airport's duty-free stores.

Since its release, the team has had to ramp up production to meet demand and has commissioned a second stainless-steel digital still from Europe – instead of the usual copper pot stills used by most distil-



What's brewing

Check out these beer, mead and spirits that are made in Singapore or made by Singaporeans overseas.

PINK BLOSSOMS BREWING CO

Try: Lean On Me, a dry-hopped, citrusy New England pale ale, and Hundred Years, a light, creamy and easy-drinking milk stout.

Just in time for Chinese New Year, it is introducing a double dry hopped, double IPA. Beers at the tap room are available for between \$12 and \$14 a pint.

Where: 50 Ubi Avenue 3, 01-12

Open: Mondays to Fridays: 5 to 11pm; Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays: 2 to 11pm

Info: www.facebook.com/pinkblossomsbrewing

Mr Teo Hong Han (left)

founded Pink Blossoms

Brewing's microbrewery and taproom.

ST PHOTO: ARIFIN JAMAR



Mr Justin Herson (left) and Mr Sanjay Jegatheesan started Lion City Meadery. ST PHOTO: KHALID BABA

LION CITY MEADERY

Try: Classic, Spiced and Hibiscus Blueberry meads. Made with a base that is a blend of eucalyptus and wildflower honey, the mead is fermented with champagne yeast for a slightly dry finish, with an acidity and sourness that come through.

Head brewer Sanjay Jegatheesan reveals that he is working on two new flavours – rose cherry and lemon-grass ginger, that will be released later this year. Bottles of its mead vary in price from \$13 to \$16, depending on where it is stocked.

Where: Stocked at various craft beer joints such as Sixteen Ounces, Bunkerbunker, Temple Cellars, Thirsty Craft Beer Shop in Holland Village and Good Luck Beerhouse

Info: www.facebook.com/lioncitymead



BRASS LION DISTILLERY

Try: Its Singapore Dry Gin is built on classic gin botanicals like juniper berries and coriander seed, but the 22 botanicals also include traditional Asian flavours like lemongrass, pomelo peel and chrysanthemum.

Also check out the blue-hued Butterfly Pea Flower variant of the gin, which changes colour when mixed with citrus, and the pink-hued Pink Pahit.

Bottles retail for \$88 each at the distillery, but the gin is also available at bars such as Jigger & Pony.

Where: Brass Lion Distillery, 40 Alexandra Terrace

Open: Tuesdays to Fridays, 5pm to midnight; Saturdays, 2pm to midnight; Sundays, 2 to 7pm, closed on Mondays

Info: www.brassliondistillery.com

Ms Jamie Koh is the founder of Brass Lion Distillery.

PHOTO: BRASS LION DISTILLERY

BINJAI BREW

Try: Error 404, a refreshing India Pale Lager; Sol Mate, a French saison; and Alt-O, an althier with hints of caramel. A six-pack of the beers is available at its official website at \$39.90.

By the first half of this year, it intends to have two new styles, a fruit-based sour and a pale ale.

Where: Bunkerbunker, Canjob Taproom

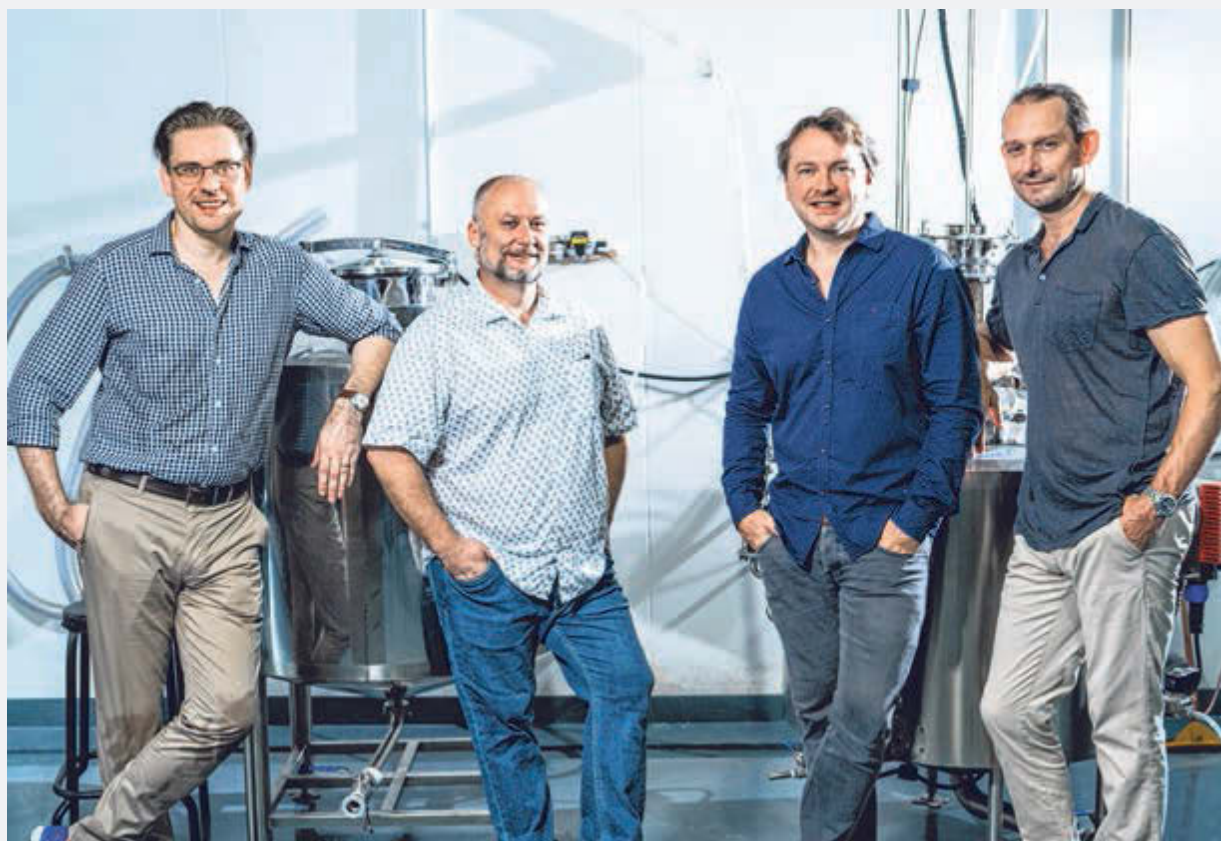
Info: binjaibrew.com or www.facebook.com/binjaibrew



Founders of Binjai Brew

Abilash Subbaraman (far left) and Heetesh Alwani.

ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO



TANGLIN GIN

Try: The flagship gin is made from 11 botanicals, including dendrobium orchid, a nod to Singapore's national flower.

Its second variant, a Mandarin Chilli gin, veers towards more Asian botanicals such as mandarin peel and kaffir lime, which are prominent on the nose, and young ginger and chilli, which leave a pleasant heat on the finish.

By the end of the year, it hopes to introduce a bourbon barrel-aged gin.

Bottles retail at \$108 on its official website. Tanglin Gin is also available at bars like Spiffy Dapper and Cin Cin.

Where: 5 Mandai Link, 01-06

Info: www.tanglin-gin.com

Tanglin Gin founders (from far left)

Andy Hodgson, Tim Whitefield, Charlie van Eeden and Chris Box at their distillery in Mandai. PHOTO: TANGLIN GIN

THE ORIENTALIST SPIRITS

Try: The Orientalist 23 gin, distilled with 23 native Asian botanicals such as torch ginger flower, ginseng and goji berries.

There are also plans to release The Orientalist Dragon gin, infused with the red dragonfruit, as well as The Orientalist vodka and The Orientalist Star vodka, which is infused with starfruit.

For The Orientalist 23, there will be a limited-edition launch of 500ml bottles at \$88 each, followed by 700ml bottles priced at \$118 each.

Info: www.theorientalistspirits.com



HIGH BARRIERS TO ENTRY

Still, there are high barriers to entry for microbreweries and distilleries, such as the need for specialised knowledge, as well as start-up and other costs such as annual licence fees.

According to Singapore Customs, a microbrewery – defined as a small-scale brewery that ferments or manufactures less than 1.8 million litres of ale, beer, stout or porter a year – needs to fork out an annual licence fee of \$8,400.

Production of more than 1.8 million litres would cost \$43,200 in licence fees a year.

Meanwhile, distilleries come under Singapore Customs' Excise Factory Scheme, where "to distil, ferment or manufacture any other intoxicating liquors", they are required to pay an annual licence fee of \$28,000.

For those who find the cost prohibitive, there are alternatives such as contract brewing or heading overseas to brew or distil.

Binjai Brew, better known as the beer that made headlines last year when its student founders flouted rules by brewing and selling it on the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) campus, has gone legitimate.

The beer is named after NTU's

Binjai Hall, the residential hall in which the founders first brewed it.

To manage costs, the three – Mr Rahul Immandira, Mr Abilash Subbaraman and Mr Heetesh Alwani – all 25 and now graduates – decided to outsource the brewing and packaging to a contract brewer in Singapore.

At the facility in Bukit Batok owned by craft beer joint On Tap, they work with the brewer to scale up home brew recipes.

The team invested a five-figure sum in the project and cans of their three beers – an India Pale Lager (IPA), a German althier and a French saison – have been on the market since December last year.

"We wanted our first three beers to be easy and approachable, so that it's a good transition for a person coming from commercial beers to craft beers," says Mr Subbaraman.

Eventually, they hope to have five to six core beers and set up a brewery with an adjoining taproom.

VENTURING OVERSEAS

There are also some who have taken their production overseas in order to save on licence fees and other costs, produce a larger volume or gain direct access to ingredients.

One such brand is Lion City Mead-

ery, which has three meads, namely Classic, Hibiscus Blueberry and Spiced.

The recipe for its flagship classic mead was perfected over a period of four years by Singaporean Sanjay Jegatheesan, 33, who was formerly in audio-visual sales but has a passion for home brewing.

The meads are now made, bottled and stored on site in Melbourne, Australia.

"For the current batch of meads, we used 1.6 tonnes of honey and it didn't make sense to fly that over to Singapore," says co-founder Justin Herson, 39.

"Also, it's more expensive to set up a facility in Singapore. If I do it in Australia and I get a better quality product because I'm closer to the source of the ingredients, then why not?"

Close to \$500,000 was invested in the project, with the first batch yielding about 11,000 bottles.

The meads are now available islandwide in various craft beer joints and restaurants.

Lion City Meadery is also setting its sights on the region and beyond.

"I want beer drinkers from overseas to understand that Singapore is more than just Tiger Beer or Archipelago," says Mr Herson.

"We have so many talented brew-

ers here putting out really good stuff and it's such a shame that not more people are drinking it."

Brewlander, another Singaporean brand that brews overseas, churns out 30,000 bottles a month out of a facility in Cambodia.

The beers – a Summer Ale, a Wild IPA and a porter – were created by award-winning Singaporean master brewer John Wei, 36, and are stocked at Changi Airport's duty-free shops. The beers are also available at Cold Storage.

Mr Wei also brews limited-edition Brewlander beers locally in a microbrewing facility called The General Brewing Co in Jurong Food Hub.

CRAFT SCENE NOT GROWING FAST ENOUGH?

Despite what seems to be the exponential growth of the craft scene here, Mr Wei feels that growth is not happening fast enough.

In fact, he feels that Singapore has been "lagging behind our Asian neighbours such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and Vietnam for the past decade".

"Sure, there have been a few new craft beer bars and local breweries in town in the past six months, but craft beer on the whole still isn't commonly available in most bars and restaurants in town, the CBD or

the tourist stretch," he says.

He also warns of the "mad rush to get on the craft bandwagon, where we may see a larger volume of mediocre or pseudo craft product, possibly at a lower price point, trying to cash in without investing in building the young eco-system".

That said, distillers and brewers The Sunday Times spoke to are hopeful, despite the small market size in Singapore.

Mr Teo from Pink Blossoms Brewing believes that "the scene is definitely going to grow, especially with a few more places opening up".

"It can only be a good thing – with more awareness and more variety, it will prompt more folks to try craft beer or even craft spirits," he says.

Mr Wei agrees.

"We have many talented craftsmen among us and it's exciting to see them take the leap of faith and apply their creative juices to create a unique Singaporean perspective in a product – be it a local taste, use of local ingredients or one that's made by a local."

He adds: "I have a little more pride when I'm drinking it. Who knows, we may have the next Mr Nigam Tong Boon of Singapore Sling fame in our midst."

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Award-winning Singaporean master brewer John Wei produces his Brewlander brand of beers in Cambodia and Singapore. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

Restaurant Review



Standout dishes include (clockwise from left) Air Baguette, The Textured Tutti Frutti and Roast Barramundi. PHOTOS: V RESTAURANT, WONG AH YOKE

Bright, bold flavours

VDining's nondescript exterior belies its excellent dishes



Wong Ah Yoke
Food Critic

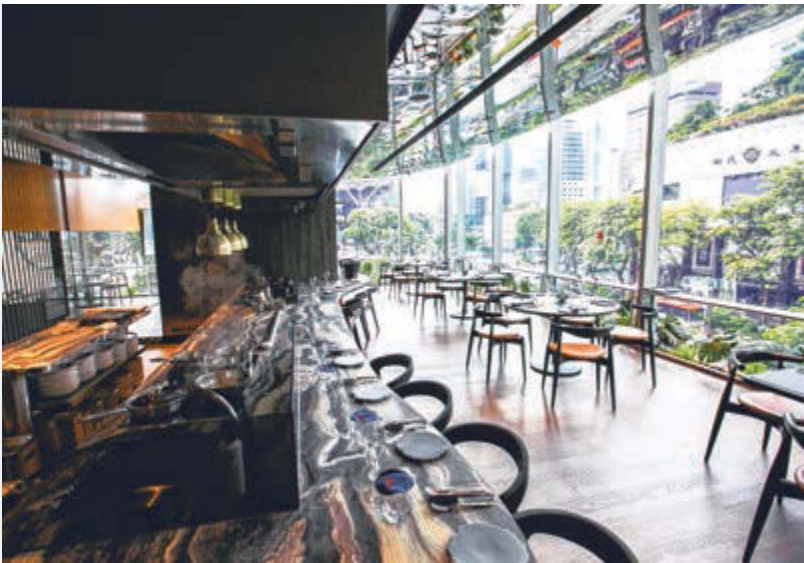
V Dining is one of the most discreet restaurants I've dined at. It is located at a corner on the third floor of Scotts Square and the only sign of its existence from the outside is a logo on the wall – an inverted sprig of two cherries forming the letter V. There is a small reception desk, but no one is manning it when I arrive. I would not have known there is a restaurant there if I had not been aware of it. It is almost as though the restaurant does not want your business. But V Dining is not your regular restaurant. It is opened by V-Zug, a super high-end appliance brand from Switzerland that has its showroom next door. Prices of its home ovens, it is whispered to me, start at five figures. The 35-seat restaurant is meant to showcase the appliances and is operated with Tippling Club chef Ryan Clift, who is a V-Zug global

ambassador, as culinary director. Running the kitchen is head chef Lee Jing Peng, a Tippling Club alumnus. Not surprisingly, the first thing you see in the L-shaped dining room is the open kitchen, where the stoves and ovens are. But only the final touches are done here and the heavy cooking happens in another kitchen that is hidden. The other thing that grabs your attention is the view of Scotts Road through the floor-to-ceiling windows. In the day, light streams in and gives the place a cheerful yet relaxed ambience that I prefer to the dim, more romantic evening mood. You can sit at the counter or at small tables and, while waiting for your food, admire the stylish images of bottles and glasses by art photographer Ron Greve on the walls. I have dined there twice, first for an invited lunch, then for dinner on my own. The menus share some snacks and desserts, but the main dishes are different. Also, you can choose two (\$48), three (\$60) or five courses (\$90) from the lunch menu, but dinner is either a six-course (\$130) or a 10-course (\$180) degustation menu. I don't just prefer the ambience in the day, but I also enjoy the dishes from the cheaper lunch menu more. Perhaps it's the brighter mood, but I find the flavours bright yet bold too. Mrs Potter Leek & Potato Soup hits the spot with its smooth texture and a full-bodied stock sweetened with vegetables. There are also pieces of deep-fried kale for an added layer of flavours. Roast Barramundi, too, is

expertly done, with the fish pan-fried nicely to form a crisp crust and served with a scattering of puffed rice for texture. A green curry sauce goes well with the fish. I also love the dessert, Lemon & Sweet Basil Tart, which comes with zingy and yummy lemon curd. In comparison, I find the soup for dinner, Watercress Veloute, not very appealing. If, like some of my friends, you do not eat green vegetables, you will hate this. I am fond of vegetables, but still, the strong green taste and hint of bitterness in this soup is not easy to like. Pigeon comes cooked just right, with the tender and juicy breast meat pink but not too rare. But the truffle mousse and fermented mushroom and spinach puree do not have enough character to make the dish stand out. The dish I like most at dinner is Hamachi because it shares many ingredients with the barramundi served at lunch, but with a more expensive fish. It looks different, though, with the fish buried under the crispy rice. The snacks are great. Laksa, a light-as-air, curry-flavoured mousse with bits of crispy tau pok and dehydrated laksa leaves, is a great idea, though the chef should go lighter on the salt. And Air Baguette, a bite-sized, crispy pastry topped with manchego cheese and a bit of truffle, is lovely. It looks pretty too, sitting on a round stone. Dessert for dinner is a tiny V Chocolate Souffle, followed by a delightful concoction called The Textured Tutti Frutti. It comprises

passion fruit, raspberry and pineapple in various textures that range from soft mousse to confit to crispy wafers. Besides the good food, another reason to dine here is that prices are decent for the level of cooking and service you get. In fact, I am willing to bet that despite its best attempts, this

restaurant is not going to stay hidden for long. ahyoke@sph.com.sg Follow Wong Ah Yoke on Instagram @wongahyoke The Sunday Times paid for its meals at the eateries reviewed here.



V DINING
03-13 Scotts Square, 6 Scotts Road, tel: 6950-4868; open: 11.30am to 2.30pm (Wednesdays to Sundays), 5.30 to 9.30pm (Tuesdays to Sundays), closed on Mondays
Food: ★★★★★
Service: ★★★★★
Ambience: ★★★★★
Price: \$48 to \$90 for lunch, \$130 and \$180 for dinner, without drinks

Cheap & Good

Bowled over by yummy Thai soup noodles



Tan Keng Yao

The menu at Thai eatery Soi Aroy can be loosely classified into three (not mutually exclusive) categories: dramatic, whimsical and delicious. First, the drama. Order its signature grilled pork cheeks (\$4.20/\$6.80 for large) and a server will come to your table with a small

blow torch and flame the sliced pork until you see the fat bubble and the edges curl up. There is also Mu Ping (\$5.80), a sweet-savoury Thai street snack of skewered grilled pork, served with skewers intersecting like the Three Musketeers' swords. For the whimsical, there is the Aurora Cooler (\$3.50), a tall icy drink of butterfly pea flower tea topped with a layer of lime juice. As you may know, when you mix an acidic substance with butterfly pea flower tea, its brilliant blue turns a vibrant purple. And so it is with this drink when you stir it. Then, there is the Candy Floss Wrap (\$4), a frivolously fun snack



Soi Aroy's Northern Thai Pork Rib Noodles is served with a pork collagen soup flavoured with tomatoes. ST PHOTO: TAN KENG YAO

of caramelised sugar spun into crisp threads and wrapped in a crepe skin. Lovely to crunch on. But I'm saving a mention of the best for the last: the range of delicious soup noodles, which is served in a rich collagen soup base. My favourite is the Northern Thai

Pork Rib Noodles (\$5.50/\$6.80 for large), which comes in a pork collagen soup intensely flavoured with tomatoes. This dish has been adapted from a northern Thai soup, Nam Ngiao, to suit Singaporeans' palates and here, the soup is meaty, rich and tart, and so thick it clings onto every strand of noodles. The generous serving of pork ribs, halved tomatoes and leafy greens add a bite to the dish. Also worth highlighting is the Premium Tom Yum Noodles (\$10.80) in a chicken collagen soup. Again, another satisfyingly intense course of sour, spicy and overall yummy. It is served with Thai freshwater prawns whose spiny lobster-like legs stick out of the bowl formidably. As tasty as it is, this dish could well fall under the dramatic category as well. So, get your camera ready for some make-your-friends-drool shots.

SOI AROY
02-08 Sim Lim Square, 1 Rochor Canal Road, open: 11am to 8pm (Mondays to Saturdays), 11am to 4pm (Sundays); go to: www.facebook.com/SoiAroySingapore or call 9641-8988
Rating: ★★★★★